

NATIONAL BUS STRATEGY – 2023 BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN (BSIP) WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL

Document Control

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Newbury Wharf Bus Station



Papercast RTPI screen at Parkway



Note about Version V3.1 of the 2023 BSIP (Bus Service Improvement Plan)

The Council produced its first Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in October 2021 in conjunction with bus operators following the publication of the National Bus Strategy.

Since 2021 it has been updated on annual basis to reflect the current position of bus services within West Berkshire.

The full BSIP document was last updated in the autumn 2023 outlining the position as was at the time, however in June 2024 a BSIP summary document was published at the following link <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/enhancedpartnership> outlining the following:

- Our Bus Vision
- Summary of Current Offer to Passengers
- Improvements made to Bus Service since 2021
- Improvements Programme to 2025
- Ambitions and Proposals for 2025-2030 and beyond
- Targets, Performance Monitoring and Reporting
- BSIP Schemes and Proposals Overview Table

The full BSIP will once again be updated to in the autumn of 2024, after the Annual Bus Users Survey has taken place and the results have been analysed.

**Transport Services Team, West Berkshire Council
June 2024**

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In March 2021, the Government published a new strategy to improve bus services in England, outside of London – [Bus Back Better](#). The strategy sets out the Government’s vision and opportunity to deliver better bus services for passengers. Essentially this would be more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, better coordinated and cheaper bus services. Local transport authorities will be given more powers to improve bus networks in their area.
- 1.2 The Council established an Enhanced Partnership with bus operators to deliver these goals, which came into effect in April 2022. This should safeguard discretionary streams of government funding for bus services to the Council and local bus operators, and also government funding for other local transport schemes.
- 1.3 The bus is seen in the strategy as a key tool in ‘Levelling Up’. In the West Berkshire context this would include enhanced frequencies on many services, new bus links introduced including the use of demand-responsive transport, simplified fares and the extension of inter-operator ticketing, more environmentally-friendly buses, and improved marketing of bus services to wider audiences.
- 1.4 This Bus Service Improvement Plan will be refreshed each year, and progress against the targets it contains will be reported on at least every six months. It should be noted that most of the ambitions included within this document will require additional funding, either as one-off investments, start-up costs, or an ongoing commitment.
- 1.5 The West Berkshire Partnership was fortunate to be allocated almost £2.6m in funding for its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in April 2022, although this was not released by the Department for Transport (DfT) until December 2022, and therefore there was a delay in progressing proposed schemes.
- 1.6 In May 2023, an additional £480k was allocated through the BSIP+ scheme. This is to be spent on maintaining or improving bus services until March 2025.

2. Overview

2.1 *Extent of Bus Service Improvement Plan*

- 2.1.1 This BSIP covers the whole of the West Berkshire District Council area, which is covered by a single Enhanced Partnership (EP). There is no appetite amongst the bus operators or the Council to progress franchising as very few services operate without subsidy.
- 2.1.2 An Enhanced Partnership is an agreement between a local transport authority and the bus operators to work together to improve local bus services. It includes a clear vision of the improvements that the EP is aiming for (the BSIP) and accompanying actions to achieve them (set out in our EP scheme).
- 2.1.3 Franchising is a model for providing bus services used in London and elsewhere in Europe. In a franchising scheme, the local authority will determine the details of the services to be provided – where they run, when they run, and the standards of the services. Bus operators would then provide their services under contract to the local authority. No other services can operate in the franchised area without the agreement of the franchising authority.



Figure 2.1 – Map of West Berkshire

- 2.1.4 The BSIP covers all registered local bus services that operate in West Berkshire, including those operated under Section 22 permits that provide vital bus services within the district.

2.1.5 We considered that a joint BSIP with any of our neighbouring local authorities would not be beneficial for improving public transport within West Berkshire as the focus would inevitably fall on the more populous area of any Partnership. However, it has been developed taking into consideration our neighbouring local authority views as far as possible, which we have sought to complement, especially regarding cross boundary services.

| Services | Hp | Ox | Rd | Sn | Wt | Wk |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Jet Black 1, Lime 2, 15, 16, 26, 33 | | | ✓ | | | |
| 2 (Baughurst), 7/7a, 44, 103, The Link | ✓ | | | | | |
| X34, 133 | | ✓ | | | | |
| 46, 46a | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 47 | | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| 110, Wiltshire Connect | | | | | ✓ | |
| 142, 143 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 154 | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ |

Key: Hp = Hampshire, Ox = Oxfordshire, Rd = Reading, Sn = Swindon, Wt = Wiltshire, Wk = Wokingham.

Table 2.1 – Bus services operating to / from neighbouring local authority areas

2.2 *Duration and review of BSIP*

- 2.2.1 The document will be reviewed on an annual basis; published on the Council's [website](#); and sent to the Department for Transport before the end of each October. In addition, the targets set in the BSIP will be reviewed every six months, and also published on the Council's [website](#).
- 2.2.2 The work of the BSIP is overseen by the Enhanced Partnership Forum (Forum). This is a group consisting of representatives of the bus companies operating services within West Berkshire at the time; officers from the Council, including those involved with transport operations, policy, and highway schemes; and other interested parties such as neighbouring local authorities and representatives of bus users. The Forum meets three or four times each year.
- 2.2.3 An annual survey to seek the views of both users and non-users, first conducted in 2021, is used to inform this document and the direction of the Partnership's focus.
- 2.2.4 The BSIP builds upon the work of other strategies and plans within West Berkshire (section 3), and in turn informs revisions to them as they are updated.

3. Strategic Context

- 3.1 The [Council Strategy](#) contributes towards the [West Berkshire Vision 2036](#), setting out the Council's priorities for improvement. It contains six priorities, all of which benefit from effective public transport. Supporting this Strategy are the [Local Transport Plan](#) (LTP), which covers the period 2011 to 2026; and the [Environment Strategy](#), introduced in 2020, and which runs until 2030.
- 3.1.1 The LTP is supported by a number of strategies, ensuring a joined up approach to sustainable transport. This includes the [draft Parking Strategy](#) and the [Active Travel](#); [Smarter Choices](#); and [Passenger Transport](#) strategies. The latter was produced in 2014, with three aims:
- To increase the market share for public transport services by making those services a more attractive choice for existing and potential customers;
 - To build upon prior initiatives and tally with future development proposals, so as to better integrate the provision of passenger transport services, and;
 - To help achieve an accessible and safe public transport network.
- 3.1.2 The Environment Strategy builds on the [UK's 2050 net zero target for greenhouse gas emissions](#), and the Council's decision to declare a climate emergency in July 2019. This was upgraded to a [climate and ecological emergency](#) in 2023. It commits the Council to deliver net zero by 2030, supports the national [Transport Decarbonisation](#) plan, and will work towards achieving net zero across West Berkshire.
- 3.2 This BSIP supports all of these documents, and follows from the [National Bus Strategy](#), which was launched in March 2021. It is also complementary to other Council strategies, including the [Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan](#), the [Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Strategy](#), and the Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs).

4. Current bus offer to passengers

4.1 West Berkshire – the area

4.1.1 West Berkshire is very much characterised by beautiful countryside and villages, with 74% of the district falling within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding natural Beauty (AONB). This is reflected in the dispersed and low density population pattern in West Berkshire.

4.1.2 The LTP defined four geographical areas in the district, each with differing characteristics, with most of the population being located within the first two. These areas are likely to change in the next LTP.

- Newbury and Thatcham
- The Eastern Area (Purley on Thames, Tilehurst, Calcot and Theale)
- The North Wessex Downs AONB
- The East Kennet Valley (rural south-east including Burghfield and Mortimer)

4.1.3 According to [nomis](#), the West Berkshire population was estimated at 161,900 in 2021, slightly above the census figure. ONS figures suggest that around 23% of the population is under 20, 21% is between 50 and 64, and 20% are 65 and over with this number rising. 43% live in Newbury and Thatcham; 18% in the Eastern Area; and 7.5% in Burghfield and Mortimer. The population density is approximately two people per hectare.

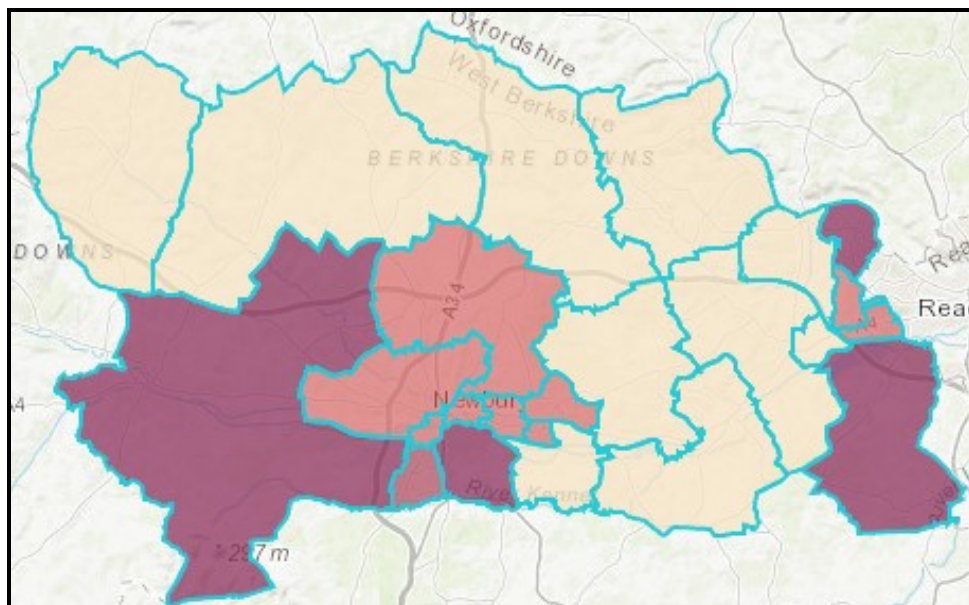


Figure 4.1 – Map showing population by ward (darker colours show more residents)

| | Numbers | Percentage (%) | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|------------|---------------|
| | West Berkshire | West Berkshire | South East | Great Britain |
| Economically active | 84,900 | 82.6 | 80.7 | 78.4 |
| In employment | 82,900 | 80.7 | 78.0 | 75.5 |
| Working in Information and Communication | 13,000 | 14.1 | 5.5 | 4.5 |
| Unemployed | 2,400 | 2.8 | 3.4 | 3.6 |

Table 4.1 – Employment (April 2022 to March 2023), [nomis](#)

- 4.1.4 The high percentage working in Information and Communication are perhaps better placed to work from home. Vodafone’s UK headquarters are still based in Newbury, although the office accommodation has been reduced. Therefore, together with a rising population age, and homes spread widely across the district, commercial bus operation is difficult.
- 4.1.5 With retail, employment and education focussed predominantly in the urban areas, and larger rural settlements, bus services tend to radiate from either Newbury or Reading.
- 4.1.6 High levels of personal wealth and healthy life expectancy, coupled with high levels of car ownership and car use overall exacerbate the difficulties in sustaining local bus services, particularly in rural areas. Notwithstanding the District’s general prosperity, there are a number of small pockets of deprivation. [Census](#) data highlights that whilst only 12% of households in West Berkshire have no access to a car, compared to the national average of 26%, this rises in some parts of Newbury / Thatcham to more than 30%.

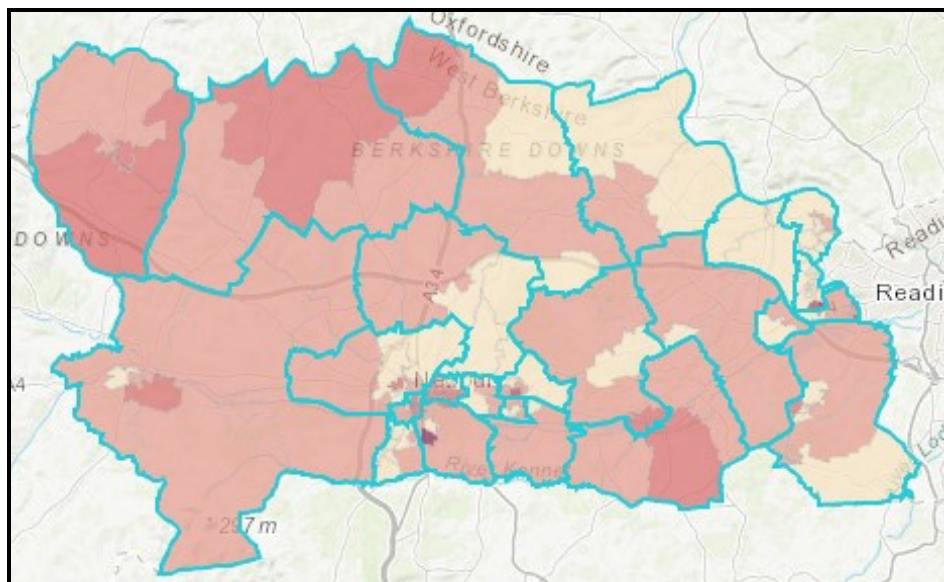


Figure 4.2 – Map showing deprivation (darker colours show more deprivation)

- 4.1.7 Positive retail and residential planning have contributed towards Newbury, the administrative and main retail town in the district, remaining relatively robust in recent years. The Park Way retail and residential development opened towards the end of 2011 in the town centre. Although the changes to high street shopping have had an impact, demand for shop units is still good. Similarly, the Market Street ‘urban village’ development to the south of the Town Centre is now almost complete. It will add 232 residential homes, and 10,200 square feet of new commercial space. [Town Centre Masterplans](#) for have been adopted by the Council for Newbury, Hungerford and Thatcham.

4.2 ***Air Quality and Climate Change***

- 4.2.1 There are two AQMAs in West Berkshire. Both are due to road traffic and exceed the Annual Mean NO₂ objective. Newbury AQMA also exceeds the one-hour NO₂ objective:

- A339/A343 (“Burger King”) Roundabout and the adjoining Greenham Road in Newbury
- A4 (Chapel Street) in Thatcham

4.2.2 West Berkshire’s 2022 [Air Quality Annual Status Report](#) recognises key elements in the LTP that can contribute towards improving air quality in the district by making the bus more attractive and reducing car usage. These are more frequent and reliable bus services with modern low or zero emission buses. In July 2019, the Council unanimously declared a climate emergency, which has been upgraded to a climate and ecological emergency in 2023. In particular, the Council acknowledged the importance of sustainable transport.

4.3 **Bus services**

4.3.1 Bus services in West Berkshire are currently operated by a number of companies:

- Go-Ahead (Salisbury Reds, Thames Travel)
- Horseman Coaches
- Reading Buses (Newbury & District, Reading Buses)
- Stagecoach (Hampshire, Swindon)

4.3.2 In addition to those services run under an Operator’s Licence, another group of services are provided using Section 22 Community Bus Permits. As these provide vital links in the district’s transport network, they are also included within the BSIP:

- Carebus
- Going Forward
- Ramsbury Community Transport
- West Berkshire Council

| Operator | Service | | Journeys | Patronage |
|-------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|--------------|--|
| Reading Buses | Jet Black 1 | Newbury-Reading | 392 | Individual data not shown at request of major operator |
| Stagecoach in Hampshire | 2 | Baughurst-Basingstoke | 759 | |
| Reading Buses | Lime 2/a | Reading-Mortimer | 410 | |
| Newbury & District | 3c | Thatcham-Hungerford | 10 | |
| Reading Buses | 15 | Reading-Calcot | 322 | |
| Reading Buses | 16 | Reading-Purley | 587 | |
| Reading Buses | 26 | Reading-Calcot | 932 | |
| Reading Buses | 33 | Reading-Tilehurst | 628 | |
| Newbury & District | 103 | Newbury-Greenham BP | 135 | |
| Stagecoach in Hampshire | The Link | Newbury-Basingstoke | 143 | |
| Totals | 10 | | 4,318 | 85,179 € |

Key: SH 2 - only one stop within West Berkshire. Lime 2/a Sunday journeys to Mortimer supported using BSIP funding. 103 - journeys to Bishop’s Green supported by Basingstoke & Deane BC. € = Estimate

Table 4.2 – Bus services operated without any direct subsidy

4.3.3 In 2023, a number of new or enhanced services commenced. The first three are funded (at least in part) by the DfT’s BSIP funding, and the latter by the DfT’s Rural Mobility Fund:

- X34 linking Newbury to Harwell and Didcot.
- 1e Newbury to Thatcham Friday and Saturday evening service.
- Lime 2/2a Sunday service extended to Mortimer.

- 110, 120 and Wiltshire Connect replacing service 20, X20 and X22 between Hungerford and Wiltshire.

4.3.4 Demand-Responsive Transport (DRT) is also due to commence in the North West Downlands, improving upon existing services 5, 5a and 5c later in 2023.

| Operator | Service | | Funded by | Journeys | Patronage |
|---------------|---------------|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|
| N&D | 1a | Newbury-Thatcham | WBC | 132 | 7,475 |
| N&D | 1c | Newbury-Thatcham | WBC | 135 | 7,148 |
| N&D | 1e | Newbury-Thatcham | BSIP | 14 | 248 |
| N&D | 2 | Newbury-Pigeons Farm | WBC | 162 | 4,823 |
| N&D | 3 | Newbury-Hungerford | WBC | 72 | 2,938 |
| N&D | 4 | Newbury-Lambourn | WBC | 106 | 4,295 |
| WBC* | 5,5a | Newbury-Brightwalton | WBC | 20 | 409 |
| WBC* | 5c | Newbury-Beedon | WBC | 10 | 243 |
| N&D | 6,6a | Newbury-The Ilsleys | WBC | 84 | 2,985 |
| SH | 7,7a | Newbury-Andover/Burghclere | HCC | 68 | 1,100 |
| N&D | 8 | Newbury-Greenham | WBC | 123 | 2,618 |
| N&D | 9 | Newbury-Racecourse | DWH, WBC | 148 | 1,842 |
| TT | X34 | Newbury-Didcot | BSIP, HW | 167 | 870 |
| WBC* | 41 | Newbury-Theale | WBC | 29 | 235 |
| WBC* | 44 | Thatcham-Calcot | WBC | 26 | 439 |
| SS | 46,X46 | Hungerford-Swindon | SC, WCC | 40 | 271 |
| WBC* | 47 | Lambourn-Swindon | OCC, SC, WBC | 55 | 424 |
| CB* | 75 | Theale-Newbury | S22 | 2 | 68 |
| SBC/SR | 110,120 WC | Marlborough-Hungerford | WCC, RMF | 86 | 156 € |
| GF* | 133 | Goring-Wallingford | S22 | 12 | 27 |
| TT | 143 | Goring-Reading | PC, WBC | 61 | 1,101 |
| GF* | 145 | Goring-Reading | S22 | 5 | 6 |
| HC | 154 | Stratfield Saye-Reading | BD, PC, WOK | 2 | 25 |
| WBC* | H1 | Hungerford Circular | PC | 9 | 29 |
| RCT* | Flyer | Aldbourn/Ramsbury-Hungerford | S22 | 4 | 54 |
| Totals | 25 | | 12 | 1,571 | 39,829 € |

Key: Operator. CB* = Carebus Volunteer Group, GF* = Going Forward CIC, HC = Horseman Coaches, N&D = Newbury & District, RCT* = Ramsbury Community Transport, SBC = Swindon's Bus Company, SH = Stagecoach in Hampshire, SR = Salisbury Reds, SS = Stagecoach in Swindon, TC = Tourist Coaches, TT = Thames Travel, WBC* = West Berkshire Council, * = section 22 operation.

Service. WC = Wiltshire Connect DRT. Patronage for these services represents that of former services 20, X20, X22 (operated by SBC, TC).

Funded by. BD = Basingstoke & Deane BC; BSIP = DfT funding; DWH = David Wilson Homes; HCC = Hampshire County Council; HW = Harwell; PC = various Town and Parish Councils; RMF = DfT Rural Mobility Fund; S22 = Not-for-profit, funded by grants and donations; SC = Swindon Borough Council; WBC = West Berkshire Council, WCC = Wiltshire County Council, WOK = Wokingham Borough Council.

€ = Estimate. 46 was operated by SBC in June 2019.

Table 4.3 – Bus services funded to operate

- 4.3.5 An overview of each of the services is included in Tables 4.2 and 4.3. Frequency of services is shown in Figure 4.3. Journeys (per week) are current (October 2023), whilst patronage (per month) is at September 2023. All data relates to travel within West Berkshire only.
- 4.3.6 Services operated without any direct subsidy (with the exception of temporary grants to offset the ongoing impacts of the pandemic) make up around 29% of the bus routes, 73% on the bus journeys, over 68% of the passenger trips, and over 78% of the bus mileage.
- 4.3.7 There are also a few registered commercial local school services in West Berkshire. These are services to Little Heath School (Reading Buses 85 to 87), Theale Green School (Reading Buses 89 and 90), Park House School (Newbury & District PH1), Langtree School (Thames Travel BB3), and Hampshire Colleges (Stagecoach 86 and 622).
- 4.3.8 Vodafone also has a bus service for the use of its employees, provided by Reading Buses, but not open to the general public. This previously substantial network has diminished with most staff now working from home.
- 4.3.9 All Reading Buses services operate from early morning to late evening, and seven days each week, with service 26 operating 24-hours. These, together with Stagecoach's The Link from Newbury to Basingstoke, form the commercial backbone in West Berkshire thanks to the more densely populated areas which they serve. The Jet Black 1 operates later than other (non-Reading Buses) services, but only throughout the evening between Theale and Reading. Patronage on Reading Buses' services had increased by almost 40% prior to the pandemic.
- 4.3.10 Despite the best efforts of Reading Buses and Newbury & District to develop the 1a and 1c as commercial operations to supplement the core Jet Black 1 service, these are now operating with financial support from West Berkshire Council. There are believed to be many reasons for this - the relatively short distances involved (Thatcham is only 3 miles from Newbury); the lack of bus priority and heavy car dominance between the towns; the cost of using the bus; and the relatively low frequencies of the 1a and 1c.
- 4.3.11 With the exception of Reading Buses and new services 1e and X34, all services operate, at best, Mondays to Saturdays between 7am and 7pm. Services in the Newbury / Thatcham area tend to operate hourly, with those extending into the North Wessex Downs being two-hourly at best, and largely timed around school movements. This can be seen on the Council's [online map](#), shown below.
- 4.3.12 Some West Berkshire villages no longer have any bus or rail service, following gradual decline over the last few decades. These villages include Aldworth, Ashampstead, Englefield, Fawley, Frilsham, Stanford Dingley, Tidmarsh, Winterbourne and Yattendon, all within the AONB; and Padworth, Sulhamstead and Ufton Nervet in the East Kennet Valley. There is no bus service to Mortimer Station.
- 4.3.13 The 75 was the only demand responsive service in the district operating on Fridays, until the launch of Wiltshire Connect in Hungerford at the end of October 2023. West Berkshire Council have previously subsidised DRT, being an early adopter in 2000. However ambitions outweighed results, and the services ceased in the intervening years. We are keen to explore this type of solution further with advances

in technology and higher expectations of instant solutions in recent years. Bids for the DfT's Rural Mobility Fund, for DRT serving the lost links mentioned in the previous paragraph, were unsuccessful in 2020.

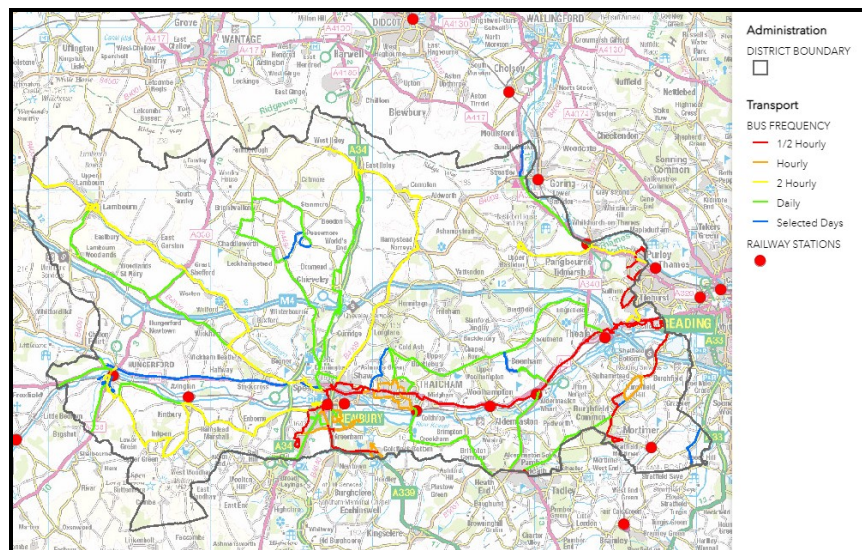


Figure 4.3 – Bus Frequency Map

- 4.3.14 With limited resources, many Newbury-based bus services are inter-worked with the same vehicles, thus potentially building delays throughout the day. These were retimed in September 2021 to improve reliability.
- 4.3.15 On schooldays most morning peak buses continue through Newbury to serve St Bartholomew's and Park House secondary schools, and Newbury College two miles south of the centre. This does require a number of codes and footnotes in timetables which we strive to present as clearly as possible. This is difficult because each service operates a slightly different route to reduce congestion outside each of the educational establishments.
- 4.3.16 In recent years, and in particular since 2016, the Council has found that it has had to start operating a number of services itself using accessible minibuses, as the cost of provision from bus operators would have meant that these services were unaffordable. Whilst these (and the other section 22 operated services) are usually operated on limited timetables, service 47 operates throughout the day on Mondays to Saturdays. A new 33-seat low floor accessible vehicle started operation on this route from September 2022 to prevent vehicle overloads.

4.4 **Funding for bus services**

- 4.4.1 As can be seen from Table 4.3, services are financially supported from a variety of sources. Table 4.4 shows how much is required on top of bus fare revenue for services to operate in the district. The devolved Local Transport Authority Bus Services Operators Grant (BSOG) of £137,099 helps to fund existing contracted bus services. In addition to the almost £2m invested in local bus services each year, section 22 operations are being operated on a not-for-profit basis, and much of their costs are covered by grants and other donations.

| Funding Source | | Estimated amount each year (£000s) |
|--|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| West Berkshire Council | Contracted bus services | £890 |
| | In-house section 22 operations | £350 |
| | Concessionary Fares reimbursement | £460 |
| Total West Berkshire Council | | £1,700 |
| West Berkshire Town & Parish Councils | | £10 |
| Developer contributions inc. Greenham Common Trust | | £210 |
| Neighbouring local authorities | | £50 |
| Total all subsidy | | £1,970 |

Table 4.4 – Financial contributions to bus services

4.4.2 As part of the Government’s [Better Deal for Bus Users](#), launched in September 2019, the Council were awarded £108,507 to improve current bus services, restore lost links, and support new bus services. The timing of this support coincided with the start of the pandemic, and it was not appropriate to start additional services when existing routes were struggling. Our improvements are included within the BSIP, but focussed around marketing, recovery of services, additional weekend and evening services, new links, and fares and ticketing initiatives. It is recognised at the time that the funding given is insufficient for most of these improvements.

4.4.3 The above funding has been enhanced by £2.6m BSIP and £478k BSIP+ funding, as well funding from the Bus Fare Cap scheme.

4.5 **Roads and reliability**

4.5.1 The Council keeps a log of congestion hotspots in the district which have a disproportionate effect on bus services. It regularly holds internal Network Management meetings, and external Highways and Utility Co-ordination meetings to minimise disruption on the network and resolve ongoing issues.

4.5.2 Some of these hotspots can be predictable, and particularly affect the peaks. Others can be intermittent, for example caused by inconsiderate parking or issues on the M4 motorway. The nature of the road network in West Berkshire can make it difficult to introduce solutions that promote reliable bus services without causing worse problems elsewhere.

4.5.3 The current hotspots have been identified as:

- Andover Road, Newbury
- Arlington Business Park, Theale
- Atherton Road, Hungerford
- Bartholomew Street, Newbury (between Pound Street and Market Street)
- Bath Road, Calcot (M4 roundabout to Reading Borough boundary)
- Bulpit Lane, Hungerford
- Carters Rise, Calcot (between Kennet Valley School and Albury Gardens)
- Glendale Avenue, Wash Common
- High Street, Kintbury (approx. 50m approach to Kintbury Square)
- Holt Road, Kintbury (between Harold Road and Newbury Street)
- Inkpen Road, Kintbury (approach to High Street)
- Kiln Road, Newbury

- Kingsbridge Road, Newbury
- London Road, Newbury (whole stretch of road)
- Newbury Street, Kintbury (west of the surgery)
- Priory Avenue, Hungerford (between Bulpit Lane and Priory Road)
- Shaw Road, Newbury
- Valley Road, Newbury
- Villiers Way, Newbury

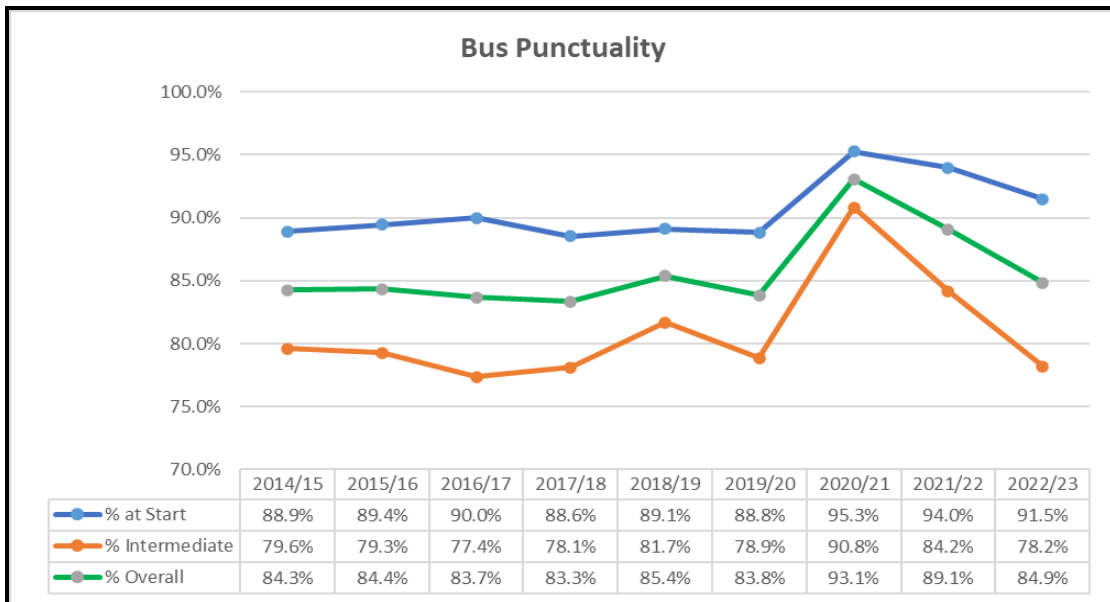


Figure 4.4 – Bus gate at Park Way bridge, Newbury © Google

4.5.4 Bus priority measures are limited in West Berkshire, and have historically been managed with bus gates, enabling more direct routes for bus services, and preventing through car traffic. The current bus gates are:

- Park Way bridge, Newbury, enforced by camera
- Two sump-busters in Calcot – Underwood Road to Carters Rise, and Pollards Way / The Chase
- Sainsbury's Calcot, allowing buses to exit stop to gain access to Pincents Lane for IKEA
- Rising bollards between Urquhart Road and Braemore Close, Thatcham.

4.5.5 A key area of Transport Focus's ['getting passengers back on buses'](#) research was improving punctuality. The graph shows punctuality in West Berkshire since 2014, which has been better than average when compared to other non-metropolitan areas in England over recent years. It has remained fairly consistent at around 83% to 84% until rising during the pandemic. As more traffic and higher passenger numbers are returning, punctuality is again starting to suffer.



Key: % shown are classed as 'On time', defined as between 1 minute early and 5 minutes 59 seconds late).

Figure 4.5 – Bus punctuality

4.6 **Bus infrastructure**

4.6.1 There are 1,045 bus stops in West Berkshire, shown on the Council's [online map](#), below. We record the facilities at each stop (including whether they have a shelter, display case, Kassel kerb). Roadside information is maintained by the Council, or operators where they run commercial services. This includes providing information and temporary stops when affected by road works.

4.6.2 Bus shelters are owned and maintained by Parish and Town Councils, with limited scope for advertising due to the rural nature of the area. There can be a reluctance of some Parish Councils to take on ownership and liability of shelters. There is a notable lack of shelters in some parts of the district, for example in Burghfield and Mortimer, even at the most well used stops.

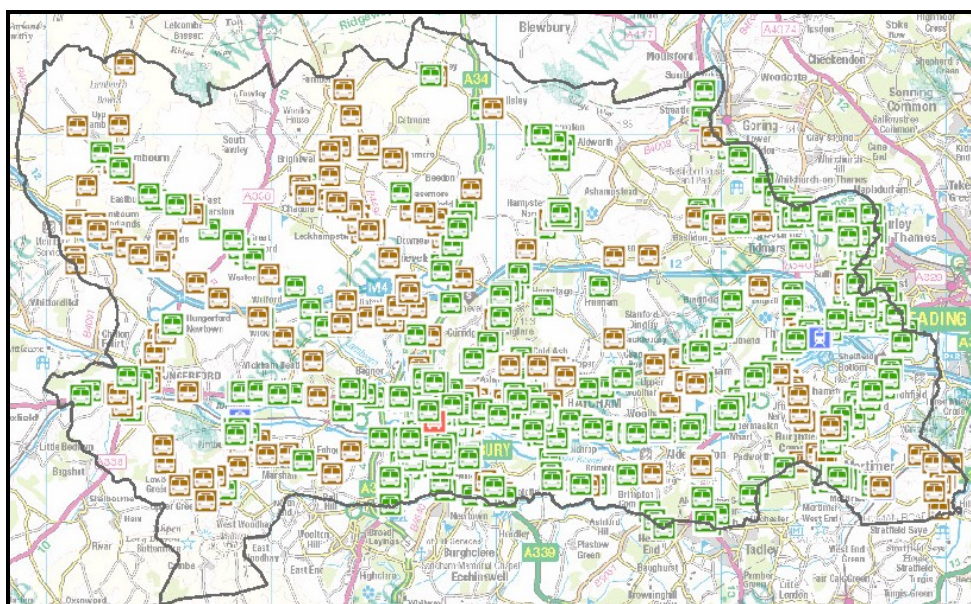


Figure 4.6 – Bus stop locations

4.6.3 The Council owns and maintains the Wharf Bus Station in Newbury, which opened in December 2018. This replaced the former facility in Market Street, to allow for redevelopment (see 4.1.7) and provides a more modern feel to the waiting environment.

4.7 **Car parking provision**

4.7.1 The Council is responsible for 2,753 spaces in 27 off-street car parks (in Newbury, Thatcham, Hungerford, Lambourn, Theale and Pangbourne), and 469 spaces in 20 on-street parking areas (in Newbury, Thatcham and Hungerford). It also manages 16 resident parking zones covering 98 roads. There is limited other paid-for parking with the main exception being the 500 space Parkway Shopping Centre car park in Newbury. Free parking is available at supermarkets in Newbury, Thatcham, Hungerford and Calcot, and other out-of-town retail areas including Newbury Retail Park and IKEA in Calcot. Parking charges vary to suit the purpose at each car park.

4.7.2 Charges in car parks in Newbury town centre are generally £1.50 an hour with incremental increases for longer periods. On-street parking is generally free for 30 minutes, then starts at £1 for an hour. Season tickets are offered at £350 per quarter or £1,150 per year. Car parks in other West Berkshire towns are cheaper.

4.7.3 The Council's current net income budget from parking and blue badges is £2.0m. Following the change in behaviour since the pandemic commenced this is now an unlikely to be achieved. Parking charges, similar to bus fares, have remained at the same rates for a few years. Some short-term parking is available and cheaper than the bus, however generally it is priced more expensively than a single person's return bus fare.

4.7.4 The Council is currently consulting on a new 10-year Parking Strategy. This strategy will consider the balance between the need for parking and the Council's environmental, economic and social implications including promoting use of active and sustainable travel.

4.8 **Other transport**

4.8.1 There is no current evidence to identify how well bus services are used in comparison to other modes of transport in West Berkshire, however the [Census](#) does provide some information on travel to work. The comparison between 2011 and 2021 in Figure 4.7 clearly shows the increase in working from home, with consequent decreases in all other modes of travel.

4.8.2 West Berkshire has 10 railway stations (shown in Figure 4.3), on three lines into Reading, all served by Great Western Railway. Most stations are on the Reading – Newbury – West Country line, with Pangbourne also linked to Oxford, and Mortimer to Basingstoke. Bus services operate near, but not directly to, most stations. Newbury Station is served directly by routes 4 and 6, but additional vehicles would be required to extend further services to the station.

4.8.3 Although National Express briefly re-introduced one daily journey each way from Newbury to Heathrow and London, this has now stopped again as it was a positioning journey for a former contractor to reach another service. We are not aware of any current plans to reinstate this or the South Coast – Newbury – Birmingham service.

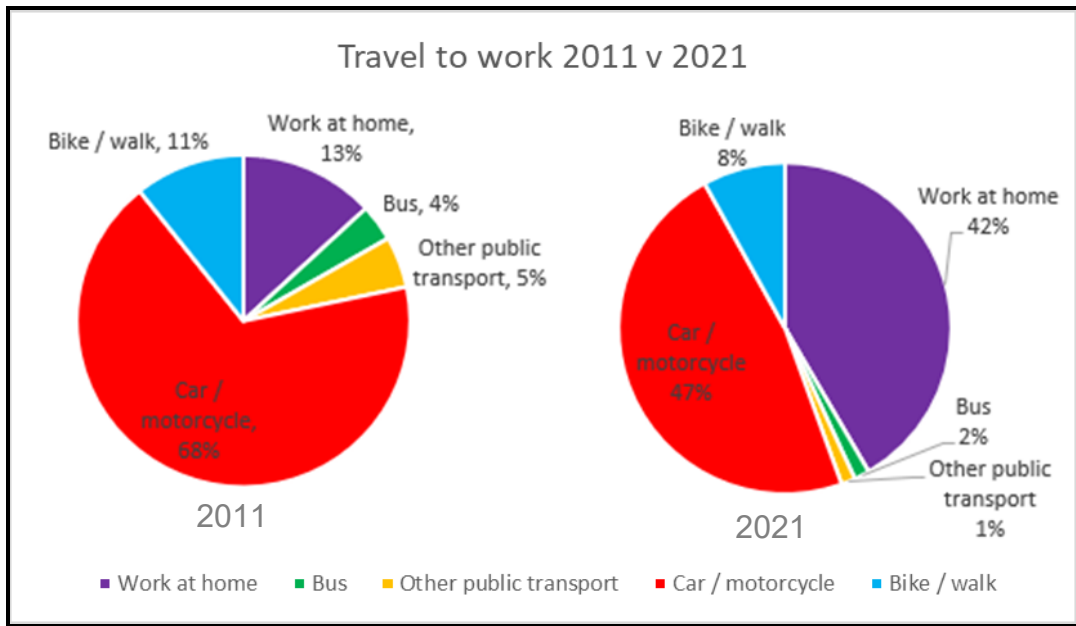


Figure 4.7 – Modal share

4.8.4 Due to the difficulties in providing cost-effective transport within the rurality of West Berkshire, the Council has encouraged and supported community transport. The Council has been supporting fourteen groups, including the Handybus network, providing grant funding to them since its inception in 1988. All groups, with the exception of Readibus, are volunteer based and all operate a range of car schemes and/or minibus group travel. Transport has to be booked in advance. Every part of the district is covered by at least one scheme.

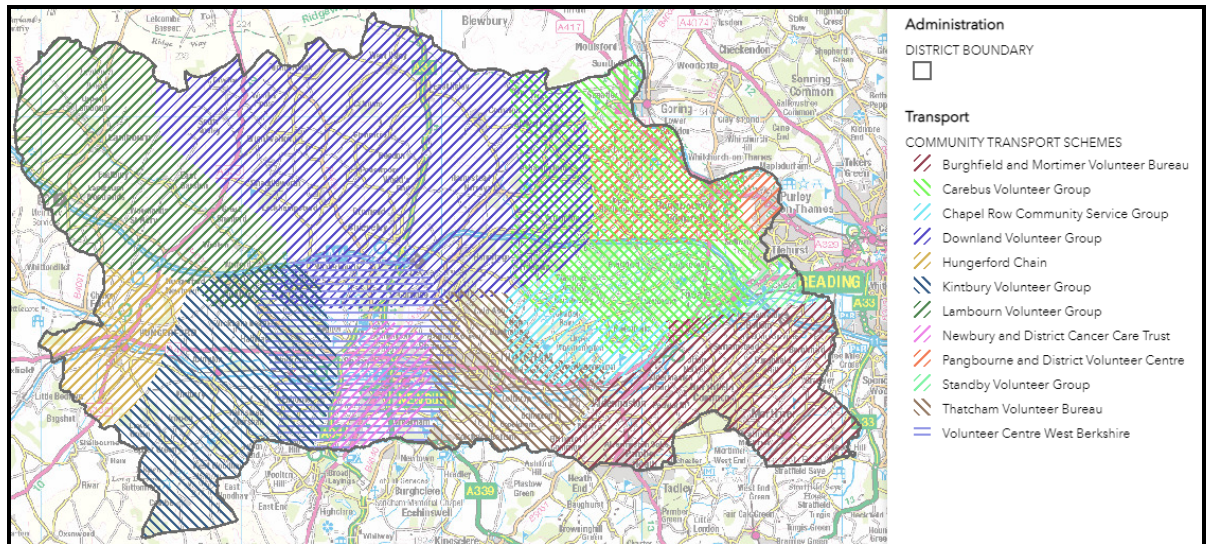


Figure 4.8 – Community transport provision

4.8.5 Taxis and private hire vehicles fulfil an important role as part of an integrated passenger transport network in West Berkshire, since they are able to provide services in situations where other transport services are not available, including a 24-hour door-to-door service.

4.9 Fares

- 4.9.1 Most bus fares within West Berkshire are based on the traditional idea of fare stages at regular intervals along the route, with fares increasing dependent upon the number of fare stages passed through. Adult and child tickets are available, as well as singles, returns, day and period tickets. In the Eastern Area, Reading Buses use a zonal fare system, with a low-priced day ticket taking the place of return fares. The maximum age for child tickets can also vary between operators and is not easy to determine for the occasional user.
- 4.9.2 Within Newbury / Thatcham, fares are similar to those in the Eastern Area, although the maximum travel distance is lower. There is also a slight difference between the fares on commercial services and the supported network. Whilst day and period tickets are available, the multi-operator Connect ticket is expensive for travel in Newbury / Thatcham, as it covers most of West Berkshire. The multi-operator tickets are not valid on Stagecoach services.

| Area | | Maximum Distance | Adult Single | Adult Return | Child Single | Child Return |
|----------------------|------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Newbury / Thatcham | Supported | 2½ miles | £2.00 | £3.50 | £1.40 | £2.00 |
| | Commercial | 3 miles | £2.60 | £4.20 | £1.60 | £2.20 |
| Eastern Area | | 4 miles | £2.30 | £3.50* | £1.80 | £2.80* |
| Rural West Berkshire | | 12 miles | £4.00 | £5.60^ | £2.80 | £3.90^ |

Key: * -Day ticket price, no return available Prices subsidised using BSIP funding. Lower introductory offer price applies. ^ -Day tickets are £6.00 Adult, £4.00 Child.

Table 4.5 – Bus fares

- 4.9.3 Whilst rural fares do offer good value for the distance travelled, there is inconsistency in fares for similar distances on different supported services.
- 4.9.4 Most local bus operators have taken part in the national £2 single fare cap scheme which runs from 1 January 2023 until 31 December 2024.
- 4.9.5 The Council operates the statutory English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) and has not offered any discretionary extras such as companions, extended hours, or other modes since 2016. It has almost 19,000 passes in circulation, of which approximately 5-6% are disabled cards. An “early bird” discounted ticket was launched across all operators in January 2023 allowing pass holders to travel before 9.30am outside of the Eastern area, brokered by the Forum. This costs £1.50 in Newbury/Thatcham and £2.00 elsewhere.
- 4.9.6 For those wishing to use both bus and train, PlusBus tickets are available for onward bus travel from Newbury and Reading stations, covering the two urban areas of West Berkshire. Where travel is possible by bus between two places with rail stations, the bus is always the cheapest option. On average a single fare is 61% more expensive by rail, reducing to only 19% more for a return ticket at peak times. Off-peak, whilst a single bus fare is slightly cheaper than rail, a return trip is better value by rail.
- 4.9.7 Information on the methods of payment available for bus fares is not always clear on operators’ websites, even though most now have the ability to pay with cash, contactless bank card, smartcard, app ticket, or pre-purchased period or multi-journey tickets.

4.10 Vehicles

4.10.1 Around 65 buses are required to deliver all the bus services in West Berkshire, including the cross-boundary services each day, as well as an additional eight section 22 vehicles. The average age of the fleet used is 9.4 years (or 9.2 years including s22 vehicles). Based on data from [DfT Bus Statistics Table BUS06](#), the national average age of a bus is 11.0 years for non-metropolitan areas of England; or 9.7 years for the whole of England (in 2022).

4.10.2 Based on information from all operators (October 2023), 95% of the vehicles used to provide bus services in use in West Berkshire are at least Euro V emission standards, with 77% being Euro VI. Reading Buses have been upgrading engines as well as investing in bio-methane (ultra-low carbon) vehicles. They also have a ZE electric bus in Reading, and Thames Travel will benefit from newer buses following a successful ZEBRA bid by Oxford Bus Company.

| Emission Standard | Buses | S22 vehicles | Total |
|-------------------|-------|--------------|-------|
| Euro VI | 79% | 67% | 77% |
| Euro V | 17% | 22% | 18% |
| Euro IV | 4% | 11% | 5% |

Table 4.6 – Vehicle emissions

4.11 Passengers

4.11.1 The following graph shows the number of passengers boarding local bus services in West Berkshire since 2009/10. The trend was relatively positive, albeit with a drop in 2016/17 and 2017/18. This was largely due to a reduction in Council spending on supported bus services which considerably reduced the supported bus network between July and September 2016, together with removing all discretionary add-ons to ENCTS. Even with this drop the number of trips in 2019/20 was still almost 10% higher than in 2010/11, compared to a national drop of [12% \(or 16% outside London\)](#).

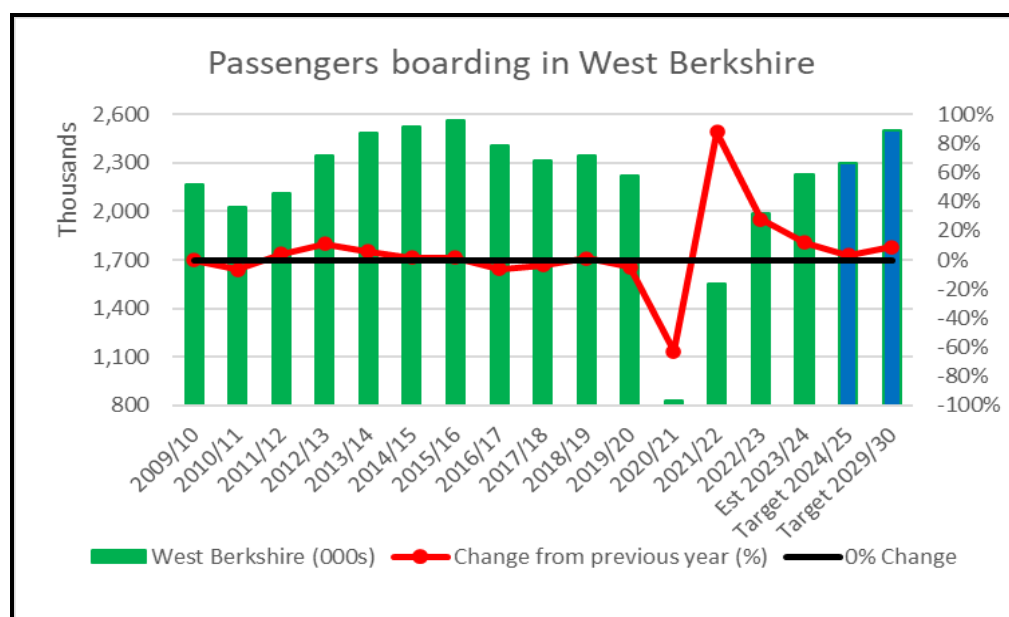


Figure 4.9 – Passengers boarding buses (compiled from Operator data)

4.11.2 Other reasons for changes in passenger numbers can be attributed positively to the Reading Buses services in the Eastern Area (strong customer focus, daily operation, higher frequencies, longer operating hours, reasonable fares, excellent publicity, fleet investment), or negatively to:

- Withdrawal of duplicated Newbury/Thatcham services when Reading Buses acquired Newbury & District.
- Congestion, causing unreliability to bus times. New developments around the town centre have particularly affected Newbury in recent years.
- The growth of on-line shopping and loss of some popular shops, rendering visits to town centres less necessary / appealing.
- The perceived low cost of driving a car, coupled with readily available parking in our town centres.
- Increases in the numbers of people working from home.

4.11.3 The onset of the pandemic affected 2019/20, however this was more prominent in 2020/21 when patronage dropped to 827,782, some 60% below the previous year. Passenger levels are now returning to nearer the pre-pandemic position, especially on the supported services. West Berkshire is still outperforming the national average. For 2021/22, patronage in West Berkshire was only 23% down on 2010/11, compared to 39% nationally; and saw an increase of 2% in 2022/23 over 2010/11.

4.12 **Information**

4.12.1 The Council has a long history of producing quality information regarding public transport, and its [Travel Guide](#) is considered to be Outstanding by the renowned timetable expert [Barry Doe](#). Prior to the pandemic, printed copies were very popular. Printed versions have resumed with the current version (September 2023). The Public Transport map has not been printed for a number of years but is also available [online](#). Travel Guides are made available in Council offices, libraries, West Berkshire Hospital (Patient Information Point), some Town and Parish Councils, and on board some buses.

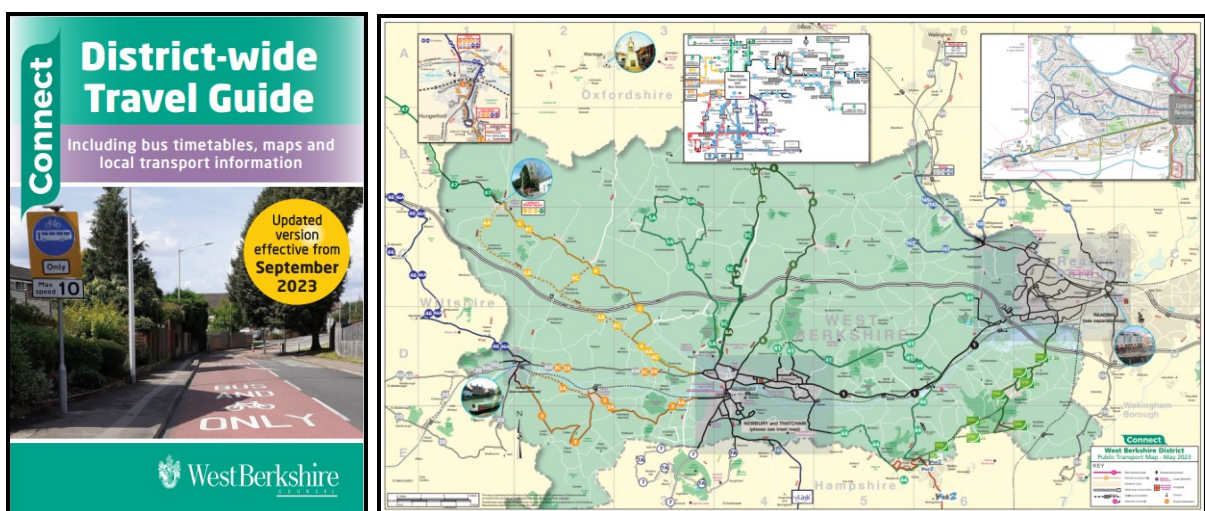


Figure 4.10 – District Wide Travel Guide / Public Transport Map

4.12.2 All services are shown on National Traveline, and operators submit their data to the Bus Operator Data Service (BODS). Other than the Council-operated services, no other section 22 operations are included as there is no legal requirement for these. Next stop announcement systems are on all Newbury & District, Reading Buses, and Stagecoach buses, and are being rolled-out on Thames Travel services. All bus companies use either Facebook or X (formerly Twitter) for live updates, the latter also used by the Council. Most also have a user-friendly app for passengers.

4.12.3 There are twelve Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) screens in the district, most installed by the Council, but managed by Reading Buses. However one is provided by Papercast in Park Way, a long-standing trial installation, and still managed by the Council. They are at the following locations:

- Calcot: Beansheaf Stores, Charrington Road (x1), Swanholm Gardens (x1), Sainsbury's (x1)
- Newbury: Rail Station (x1), Park Way (x2), The Wharf Bus Station (x1)
- Thatcham: Broadway (x2)
- Theale: The Crown (x1)
- Tilehurst: Overdown Road / Tring Road (x1)
- West Berkshire Hospital (x1)

4.13 ***Barriers to improvement***

4.13.1 The pandemic continues to have an adverse impact on passenger numbers. It is estimated that patronage on the Newbury contracted network is now around 5% below the same period pre-covid, with revenue similar. Some of the factors preventing use include:

- Initial government messages to avoid public transport and continuing anxiety amongst some ENCTS pass holders (although this has significantly diminished in our 2023 survey)
- A wide acceptance amongst employers that employees can continue to work from home
- The rise in internet shopping
- Closure of shops and restaurants – in Newbury's Parkway anchor stores Debenhams and John Lewis have both closed for good, although Next has now replaced John Lewis
- Frequency of existing services
- No bus services in many rural villages
- Bus fares perceived to be high

5. Public engagement

5.1 Annual surveys

5.1.1 In August 2021, the Council conducted its first annual survey to identify current satisfaction with a range of issues, as well as gain insight into what people would like in order to use bus services, or use them more often. The [2022 survey](#) looked particularly at bus use and satisfaction, the cost of travel, and how our BSIP funding is proposed to be spent, which has been built on in our [2023 survey](#).

5.1.2 We are confident that our consultations are gaining better results each year by the number of validated responses received. In 2015 (414) and 2016 (399) we consulted on cuts to bus funding. This year we received 1,020 responses, compared to 712 (2021) and 1,305 (2022) now that we are asking about improvements.

5.2 Frequency of travel

5.2.1 People appear to be using the buses more often. Whereas around a third of respondents used the bus at least weekly in 2021 and 2022, that number has now increased to almost 40%. This maybe because less non-users have completed the survey this year (only 25% haven't used a bus in the last three months, down from 38% last year), or it could be that more people are now using the bus, and those that do use it travel more often.

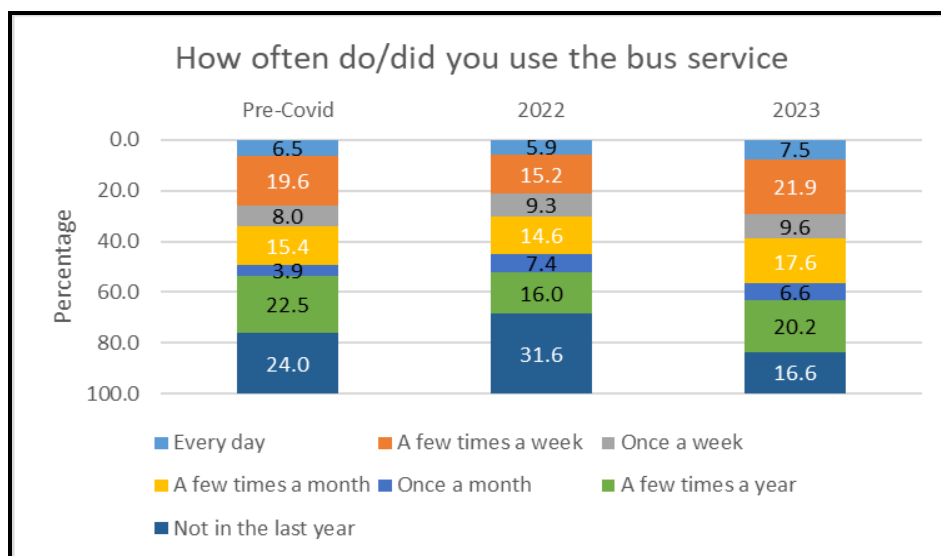


Figure 5.1 – Travel patterns before pandemic and now

5.2.2 The DfT have been concerned that ENCTS passholders have not returned to the bus network following covid. We identified that in West Berkshire, passholders use the bus daily (2%), at least weekly (48%), and at least monthly (77%).

5.2.3 From the 2021 survey, we know that around two thirds of users catch the bus in the morning, dropping to 40% in the afternoons. A further 36% travel at differing times. The bus is most used for: shopping (71%), appointments (54%), seeing friends (49%) and days out (39%). The relatively low figures for work (21%) and education (9%) were likely caused by changing working habits during the pandemic, and the very low response rate amongst under 18s in the 2021 survey (1.5%).

5.2.4 There is consistency in reasons for not travelling over the years, although it is noticeable that the convenience of the car is now less of a factor, as is the lack of knowledge of buses.

| Reason for not travelling | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---|------|------|------|
| Buses are not at suitable times | 68% | 51% | 68% |
| Car is more convenient | 60% | 52% | 44% |
| The bus doesn't go where I need to get to | 46% | 32% | 35% |
| I prefer to walk / cycle (*or use the train) | 11% | 14% | 18% |
| Bus stops are not in convenient locations | 13% | 13% | 12% |
| The bus is too expensive | 18% | 10% | 11% |
| * There is no bus service | * | 7% | 9% |
| I don't know enough about buses to be confident to use them | 15% | 14% | 7% |
| I have difficulty getting to the stop / using the bus | 4% | 4% | 4% |
| * Don't need to travel | * | n/a | 3% |
| * The bus journey is too long | 25% | 4% | 2% |
| Other reasons | * | 3% | 3% |

Key: * Not asked as a specific option. Different options asked in 2021. Respondents could tick more than one box.

Table 5.1 – Reasons people do not use buses

5.2.5 For those that indicated that they didn't use the bus, or didn't use it at least weekly, we asked what would encourage more use. Unsurprisingly the responses correlate against why people do not use the bus.

| Would encourage (more) bus use | 2023 |
|--|------|
| More frequent services | 28% |
| More routes or destinations | 24% |
| Later / evening services | 10% |
| Cheaper fares (or don't increase the fare cap) | 9% |
| More direct / quicker journeys | 5% |
| Better links to rail | 4% |
| More weekend buses (Sundays) | 3% |
| Buses at commuting times | 2% |
| More convenient bus stop locations | 2% |
| Better information | 2% |
| More reliable | 2% |
| Other reasons | 10% |

Table 5.2 – What would encourage use?

5.3 **Free bus travel**

5.3.1 As discussed in section 7.10.8, the Partnership has run a number of free bus events since 2021. At the time of the 2022 survey, users could have been aware of events through to June 2022. With each event, both knowledge of the free travel, and those taking part grew from the previous time. The percentages specifically exclude those already entitled to free bus travel through use of their ENCTS passes. The 2023 survey showed that 30% had used the free bus days, with the increase possibly attributed to the six Saturdays of free buses at the end of 2022.

5.3.2 Of those that used the free travel at least once in last year’s survey, 61% confirmed that it has made it more likely that they will pay to use the bus in the future – a great result which is borne out by patronage data. Of the 39% who wouldn’t, almost a quarter said this was because they already use the bus regularly. A slightly different question was asked in 2023, to which 40% confirmed that they have used buses more as a result of the free bus days.

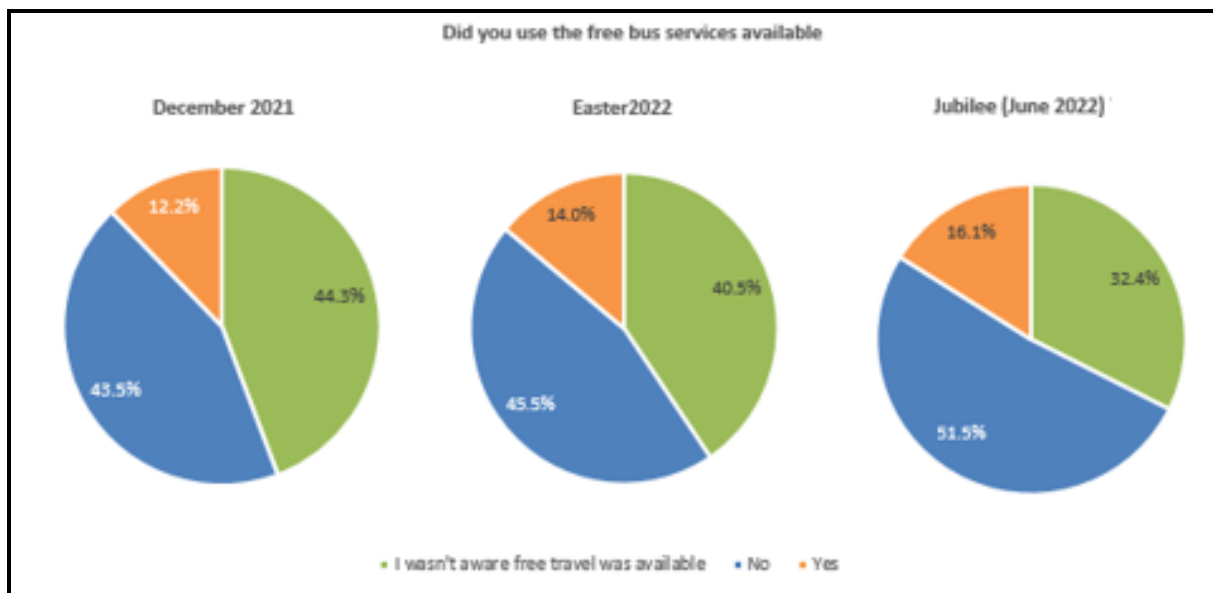


Figure 5.2 – Use of free travel promotions

5.4 **Fares and ticketing**

5.4.1 In the 2021 survey, 62% of respondents were in favour of a day ticket valid on all buses. For 2022, we asked which of eleven specific proposals for reducing fares respondents would prefer, as well as letting them come up with their own suggestions. For the proposals, people could rank them from best to worst. A score of 10 would be favoured by everyone. Only those that pay for travel provided answers. Whilst the two most popular options were for reductions to current fares, it is interesting to see that the ability to make card payments was very popular.

| What bus fare or ticketing scheme would make you more likely to use the bus service in future | Score (out of 10) |
|---|-------------------|
| Reduced daily ticket price up to £1 off current fares | 8.9 |
| Reduced daily ticket price up to 25% of current fares | 8.6 |
| Ability to pay on all buses using a credit or debit card | 8.3 |
| Newbury / Thatcham day ticket valid on all buses | 7.7 |
| Short-hop one-way fare of £1 (e.g. up to two stops) | 7.1 |
| Ability to pay on all buses using cash | 6.3 |
| Family tickets for bus travel | 6.0 |
| Automatic daily price cap for bus travel even if you use several buses | 5.7 |
| Consistent age limit for young people’s reduced fares across all services | 5.6 |
| Zonal rather than graduated fares (e.g. all travel within Newbury same cost) | 5.1 |
| Job-seekers reduced fare pass | 4.1 |

Table 5.3 – Fares and ticketing proposals

- 5.4.2 168 respondents gave further thoughts on the subject, with the most popular requests being:
- For carnets of tickets, either physical or on smartcards or apps.
 - Reduced price travel for ENCTS pass holders before 9.30am.
 - Cheaper fares.
 - App-based, pre-paid smartcards or online ticket purchase.
- 5.4.3 The Partnership is committed to many of these suggestions. Carnets are already available in the rural areas, as are app-based tickets and pay by card or phone for most journeys. Discussions have commenced on consistent age limits for young people (7.10.4).
- 5.4.4 For 2023 we asked about four specific fare options that are now available: a reduced price ticket for ENCTS pass-holders to travel before 9.30am on weekdays (“Early bird”, 7.10.5); group tickets (7.11.3) available across West Berkshire (Reading or Connect); and the national £2 fare cap. Whilst usage is still quite low for early bird and group tickets, 60-70% of those that have used them believe that they will encourage use, as will 20-30% of all respondents.
- 5.4.5 The national fare cap (7.10.2) has proved more popular (37% use, only 32% unaware), with over 50% of respondents suggesting that it will encourage bus use. Interestingly, most of its users don’t travel as frequently as those using the other fares initiatives, perhaps because more frequent users use period passes instead which can offer better value for money.

| | ENCTS holders | All respondents | | Travel at least | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-----|
| | Have used | Encourages use | Once / week | Once / month | |
| Early Bird | | | | | |
| Have used ticket | 12% | 7% | 65% | 77% | 92% |
| Aware but not used | 28% | 24% | 27% | | |
| Not aware | 60% | 69% | 24% | | |
| Reading All-Bus Group Ticket | | | | | |
| Have used ticket | | 9% | 68% | 63% | 89% |
| Aware but not used | | 26% | 22% | | |
| Not aware | | 65% | 17% | | |
| Connect Group Day Ticket | | | | | |
| Have used ticket | | 4% | 58% | 61% | 90% |
| Aware but not used | | 27% | 23% | | |
| Not aware | | 69% | 17% | | |
| National £2 single fare cap | | | | | |
| Have used ticket | | 37% | 86% | 51% | 82% |
| Aware but not used | | 31% | 31% | | |
| Not aware | | 32% | 41% | | |

Table 5.4 – Use of fare initiatives

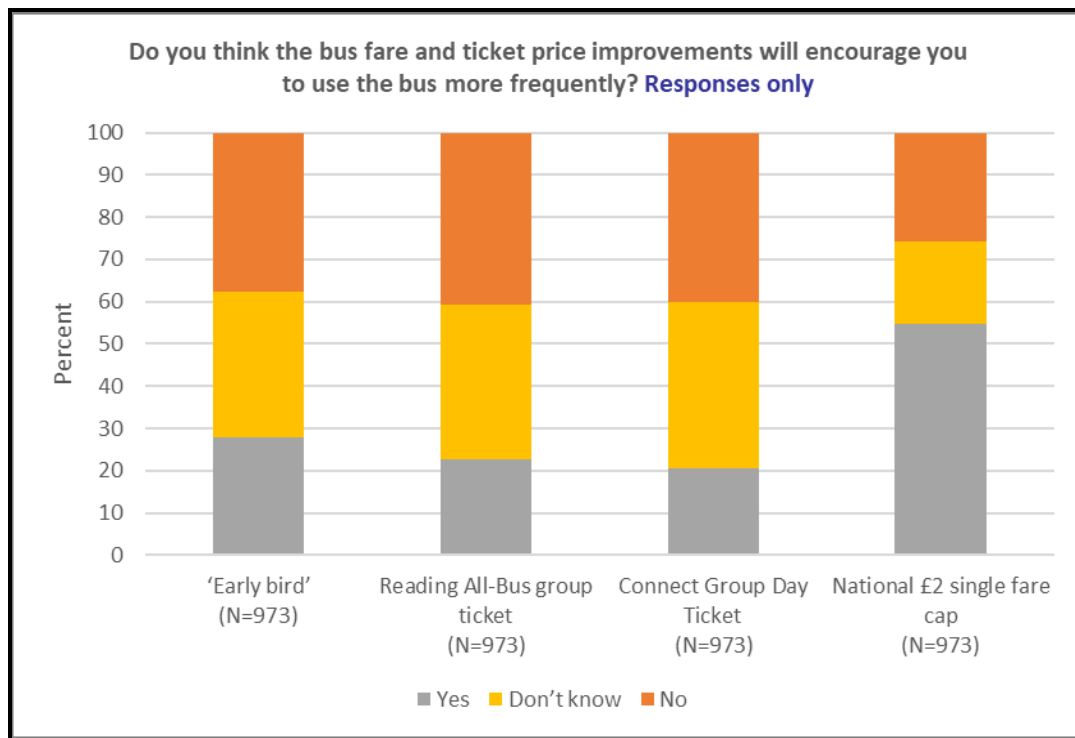


Figure 5.3 – Will fare improvements increase use?

5.5 DfT-funded schemes

5.5.1 Since being awarded BSIP funding, we have taken the opportunity to seek views on proposed bus service improvements through our annual surveys. Of those that live within the catchment of each scheme, over half of respondents claimed that they would make more use of the bus if the schemes were implemented when asked in 2022.

| Proposed scheme | Use bus more |
|--|--------------|
| North West Downlands DRT | 60% |
| Newbury to Harwell new service | 63% |
| North East Downlands DRT | 57% |
| Pangbourne to Reading improved frequency | 69% |

Table 5.5 – BSIP-funded proposals

5.5.2 **North West Downlands DRT.** 11% of survey respondents live in this area. 17% of these use the current services, and 42% expect to use the DRT. Only 65% of those that use the current services expect to use DRT, therefore the marketing will need to be clear that the DRT is an enhancement of the current services. Use will predominantly be for leisure (68%), shopping (54%), and medical appointments (30%). It will be used less for work (16%) or education (9%). When asked why those that live in the area would not use the service, it again highlighted that we need to be clear with our marketing to attract users.

5.5.3 **Newbury to Harwell.** This service started in July 2023. Whilst there have been some issues with reliability due to roadworks in Oxfordshire and incidents on the A34 it is carrying steady numbers.

- 5.5.4 The table below shows how often, and why, the service will be used. Comparing expected use from the 2022 survey, demand is reduced and more will need to be done to advertise the benefits of the service. This maybe because of the need to change buses to reach Oxford, although almost half appear willing to do that. 29% of respondents believe that they will use the service at least once a year.
- 5.5.5 Unsurprisingly, those planning on using the service for education are expecting to use it daily (25%) or weekly (75%), whilst around 60% of those using it for work will do so at least weekly. For most potential users however, they will use it less frequently.

| Reason for travel | All respondents | Daily | At least weekly | At least monthly |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-------|-----------------|------------------|
| 2022 response | | 5% | 18% | 64% |
| All respondents | | 1% | 4% | 12% |
| Work at Harwell | 3% | 0% | 57% | 57% |
| Work elsewhere | 7% | 10% | 60% | 70% |
| Education | 1% | 25% | 75% | 75% |
| Onward travel | 47% | 2% | 10% | 38% |
| Shopping | 49% | 2% | 11% | 44% |
| Leisure | 62% | 1% | 8% | 41% |
| Other | 19% | 2% | 16% | 46% |
| > Connect to rail | > 37% | | | |
| > Visit family / friends | > 23% | | | |
| > Medical appointments | > 20% | | | |

Table 5.6 – How often will people use this service?

- 5.5.6 **North East Downlands DRT.** 17% of the survey respondents live here, an area mostly without bus services. 12% use the current 143 service, and 16% will use the DRT scheme. Similar to the North West Downlands, only 65% of current bus users expect to use the DRT.
- 5.5.7 **Pangbourne to Reading.** 8% of respondents live in Pangbourne, of which 68% use the current 143 service, and 84% use the train. 66% use both the bus and train. 85% of those in Pangbourne will use a more frequent bus service, including 72% of current train users.
- 5.5.8 Two additional schemes were added this year, both commencing in September. **Newbury to Thatcham Friday & Saturday evening service.** The daytime service is used by 29% of respondents, of which 62% will use this enhancement. **Mortimer Sunday service.** The daytime service is used by 7% of respondents, of which 76% will use the enhancement.

5.6 **Supported bus network**

- 5.6.1 The Council have three contracts for bus services excluding recent enhancements made using BSIP funding. These contracts expire in September 2024. Due to the change in bus economics (rising costs, reduced revenues), we wanted to make sure that the Council resources are allocated appropriately. Rather than go into too much detail, we asked if we should focus bus provision in the Newbury urban or the rural areas.

5.6.2 Of those living in the Newbury urban area, 30% felt this was a priority, but 53% requested that we focus across West Berkshire. Of those living in the rural area, 77% felt it was a priority, but a further 19% considered the wider area.

5.7 **Information**

5.7.1 This year we asked how well-informed people felt about bus services. Whilst 19% felt informed, 36% did not. Unsurprisingly, those that were satisfied with information about bus services felt more informed (33%) than those that were dissatisfied (3%). Conversely, 10% of those satisfied did not feel informed, compared to 40% of those dissatisfied.

| | Better inform public |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Printed timetables | 22% |
| Clearer online information | 15% |
| Information at stops / stations | 13% |
| Promotion | 10% |
| Social media | 9% |
| RTPI screens and on-line tracking | 7% |
| Improved App | 7% |
| Newsletters | 6% |
| Other suggestions | 11% |

Table 5.7 – How to better inform the public about bus services

5.7.2 Printed timetables may have been particularly high this year given the lack of a printed Travel Guide since 2018 (4.12.1) with the survey finishing as a new guide was published. Bus timetables are at most bus stops, so it may be that we need to give more information on fares and onward travel options to assist users.

5.8 **Satisfaction**

5.8.1 In 2021 we asked bus users about satisfaction with a range of factors. The net satisfaction ranged from 72% positive for drivers' customer care skills, to 18% negative for current bus timetables, although this was the only factor that had a negative net satisfaction.

5.8.2 From this, it was clear that the current times of buses, including how often they run, is the biggest issue. This is not unexpected due to the rural nature of the district and its low population densities, especially outside of the towns. It is unfortunate that we have not been allocated any funding to address this.

| Attribute of Current Bus Services | Net Satisfaction |
|--|------------------|
| Drivers' customer care skills | 72.2 |
| Cleanliness of the buses | 65.9 |
| Comfort on the buses | 60.1 |
| Time keeping / reliability of the buses | 58.3 |
| Time on bus to complete journey | 53.0 |
| In journey information (e.g. next stop announcements) | 44.2 |
| Choice of ways to buy ticket | 43.7 |
| Facilities at your usual bus stops | 34.1 |
| Provision of bus information (printed / online / at stop / apps) | 32.9 |

| Attribute of Current Bus Services | Net Satisfaction |
|--|------------------|
| Choice of ticket types available | 32.8 |
| Environmental friendliness of the buses (fuel type) | 31.3 |
| Cost of bus fare | 24.7 |
| Current bus routes | 21.8 |
| Response to road closures / works | 20.6 |
| Current bus timetables (times / days of operation / frequency) | -18.0 |

Note: Net satisfaction is the difference between those that were satisfied or very satisfied, and those that were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Table 5.8 – Net satisfaction of bus users 2021

5.8.3 In 2022 we focussed the satisfaction questions on the key elements of bus travel: value for money; punctuality; length of time on the bus; information about bus services; and the passenger waiting environment. For 2023 we also added frequency of service as that is a key reason for people not using buses. Whilst people are more satisfied with value since the introduction of the national fare cap and the West Berkshire ‘Free Bus’ days, all other measures have shown a decline in satisfaction.

5.8.4 Whilst it is disappointing that satisfaction has dropped since last year, it is still higher than 2021 for value (more than double), time on bus and information. It is worrying that satisfaction with the waiting environment continues to drop, and this needs to be a focus for the future.

| 2023 % (Change from 2022) | All Respondents | Bus Users | Bus Users Net Satisfaction |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| Bus Services Overall | 44 (-3) | 60 (-6) | 41 (-7) |
| Value for Money | 54 (6) | 68 (6) | 57 (9) |
| Punctuality | 55 (-3) | 66 (-7) | 51 (-12) |
| Frequency of service | 27 (n/a) | 37 (n/a) | -6.6 (n/a) |
| Length of time on the bus | 53 (-3) | 67 (-8) | 57 (-10) |
| Information about bus services | 46 (-1) | 56 (-7) | 38 (-10) |
| Passenger waiting environment | 35 (-3) | 44 (-5) | 20 (-8) |

Note: Net satisfaction is the difference between those that were satisfied or very satisfied, and those that were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Table 5.9 – Current satisfaction ratings

5.8.5 Following a suggestion made at a Forum, this year we also asked about satisfaction with the last bus journey made, as this would give a more accurate comparison with the Transport Focus surveys undertaken in other parts of the country. Whilst table 5.8 gives an indication of where we need to get better to attract car users, table 5.9 gives a better indication of the things that are important to those that do use the bus.

| 2023 Last bus journey | All Respondents who used bus in last year | Bus Users i.e. within last month | Bus Users Net Satisfaction |
|-----------------------------|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Bus Services Overall | 70.6% | 75.1% | 65.8% |
| Value for Money | 67.9% | 71.9% | 63.7% |
| Punctuality | 71.9% | 75.6% | 61.7% |

| 2023 Last bus journey | All Respondents who used bus in last year | Bus Users i.e. within last month | Bus Users Net Satisfaction |
|--------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Frequency of service | 40.9% | 47.6% | 11.8% |
| Length of time on the bus | 65.1% | 71.9% | 62.9% |
| Information about bus services | 52.9% | 58.8% | 41.5% |
| Passenger waiting environment | 44.5% | 48.9% | 26.2% |

Table 5.10 – Current satisfaction ratings with last bus journey

5.8.6 Satisfaction with the last journey based on frequency of travel shows that satisfaction tends to drop for those travelling less often. It is also lower for daily users (except for information and waiting environment) maybe reflecting their need to travel by bus in some cases rather than by choice.

| % | Daily | Few / week | Weekly | Few / month | Monthly | Few / year |
|-----------------------------|-------|------------|--------|-------------|---------|------------|
| Bus Services Overall | 69 | 77 | 75 | 76 | 72 | 67 |
| Value for Money | 70 | 76 | 69 | 73 | 63 | 65 |
| Punctuality | 54 | 77 | 81 | 78 | 79 | 71 |
| Frequency of service | 44 | 49 | 48 | 50 | 42 | 26 |
| Time on the bus | 73 | 76 | 73 | 70 | 61 | 53 |
| Information | 66 | 58 | 53 | 58 | 64 | 42 |
| Waiting environment | 52 | 48 | 50 | 45 | 55 | 37 |

Table 5.11 – Satisfaction by frequency of travel

5.8.7 Based on the satisfaction with the last journey, the biggest differences are by age. 18 to 24s (62%) and over 75s (63%) are significantly less happy than those of other age groups (69 to 83%).

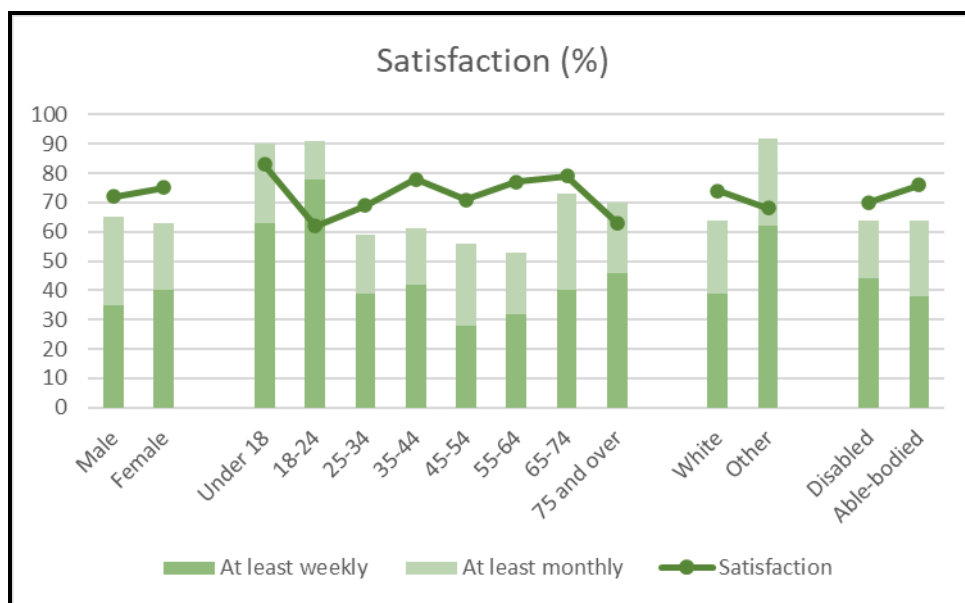


Figure 5.4 – Satisfaction and travel frequency by category

5.9 Suggested improvements

- 5.9.1 In the 2021 survey we asked respondents to tell us their suggestions for how local bus services could be improved. We have refined this to ask for only one change. It is clear from responses throughout the surveys that even where satisfaction is high for current service provision, there is a clear wish for improved frequencies and services connecting to more places, both within and outside of West Berkshire.

| Suggested change | Improve one thing |
|---|-------------------|
| More frequent services | 30% |
| Additional bus links | 24% |
| Evening buses | 11% |
| Weekend buses | 6% |
| Better connections (including to rail, schools) | 6% |
| Fares and ticketing improvements | 6% |
| Better reliability / faster journeys | 5% |
| Better buses | 4% |
| Improved information and promotion | 3% |
| Improved passenger waiting environment | 2% |
| No changes | 2% |
| Other service improvements | 1% |
| Other | 1% |

Table 5.12 – Improvements

- 5.9.2 We then gave respondents a chance to share any thoughts they had regarding bus travel. As this was a free-text box, some chose to use it to re-emphasise early comments, whilst others wanted to say how good or bad they felt the current position was.
- 5.9.3 One major change from last year is that there are more calls for new bus links rather than improved frequencies. This maybe because respondents can see that the Council and bus operators are being pro-active with new services (X34, 1e, Sunday Mortimer service). Other responses are broadly in line with last year.

| Comments | 2023 (2022) |
|--|-------------|
| Requests for new bus links | 27% (14%) |
| Positive comments about the current position | 16% (21%) |
| Negative comments about the current position | 9% (4%) |
| Requests for more frequent services | 9% (16%) |
| Requests for better evening and Sunday services | 7% (10%) |
| Requests for better reliability or faster journeys | 6% (6%) |
| Requests for affordable services | 6% (7%) |
| Requests for better information or promotion | 5% (8%) |
| Requests not to cut bus services | 5% (n/r) |
| Requests for improved comfort and cleanliness on board | 3% (2%) |
| Requests for improvements to the waiting environment | 2% (3%) |
| All other comments | 5% (9%) |

Table 5.13 – Final comments

5.9.4 Broadly, given free range (rather than the previous question), there are still similar trends in what respondents want.

5.10 **Who completed the survey**

5.10.1 One of the misgivings we had with the 2021 survey results, is that we had a poor response rate from younger people. Those aged up to 24 only accounted for 4.1% of the responses, and those aged 25 to 34, a further 5.4%. In contrast, those aged 66 and over made up over 43% of the responses. A couple of positives though, is that two-thirds of respondents would recommend bus use, and 20% would like to join a user group focussing on bus travel.

5.10.2 In 2022, we made an effort to attract more responses from young people, including posting a tiktok video and visiting some schools. The responses from those up to 24 had risen to 6.8%. Whilst this may not seem that many more, it represented an increase from 29 to 89 respondents. 25 to 34 year-olds added a further 6.3%, meaning that almost one in seven responses were from those under 35. 25% asked to be able to give further views about bus travel.

5.10.3 In 2023, the numbers of young people responding dropped again, but were still up on 2021. 60% of responses were from women, 24% had a disability or other long-term health issue, 36% hold an ENCTS card, and 7% are from an ethnic background. This time almost half of respondents asked to be able to give further views.

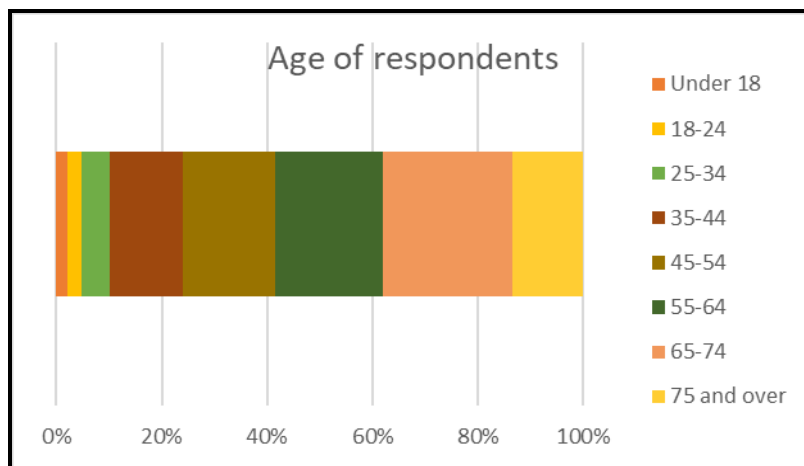


Figure 5.5 – Age range of respondents

5.10.4 Respondents were from the following geographical areas (4.1.2): Newbury & Thatcham (39%), North Wessex Downs (28%), Eastern Area (22%), East Kennet Valley (9%), or outside West Berkshire (3%).

5.11 **Public Health survey**

5.11.1 In 2023 colleagues in Public Health at West Berkshire Council carried out a study of the experiences of older residents with walking and using buses. The [survey](#) ran for 6 weeks over the early summer months. The aim of the survey was to understand the complexities of the ability to travel in West Berkshire to look at shaping Council services that make a difference to local residents.

5.11.2 The high-level patterns/trends from survey are as follows:

- Walking is undertaken overwhelmingly for physical health benefits.
- As people age, they are far more sensitive to the quality and width of the footways.
- Roughly a quarter of the respondents stated that would walk more if they had a companion.
- 35% of respondents worried about personal safety, rising to 46% for female respondents.
- Main safety concerns are trip hazards, bicycles, scooters on footway and anti-social behaviour.
- More women (45%) than men (33%) use buses regularly.
- Bus use is significantly greater in urban areas than rural areas.
- Majority of people in all age groups stated they would be able to use the bus more.
- The improvements that would help people use the bus more are:
 - More frequent services (48%)
 - More reliable services (45%)
 - More routes (36%)
 - Longer operating hours (27%)
 - Real-time information (26%)
 - Paper timetables (19%)
- Covid appears to have reduced travel by bus and car but people are walking more.
- Most respondents have access to a car but this decreases with age.

5.11.3 A series of recommendations are being established from the study, and the Transport Team will work with Public Health colleagues to ensure that the recommendations are considered and worked through.

6. **Headline targets**

6.1 ***How and why?***

6.1.1 Between the Council and the bus operators, a lot of information is available regarding bus services. This can be from a variety of sources, including:

- Ticket machines – record how many people use the services, what they pay, where they get on
- Apps / websites – can record how many visits to specific pages
- Surveys – can obtain information on satisfaction, changes people would like to see

6.1.2 The BSIP sets targets for journey times, service reliability, passenger levels, and customer satisfaction for 2025 and 2030. Progress against these targets will be reported every six months. Whilst there are overall targets for each category, some are further sub-divided to better show specific impacts that the EP is having. Targets set for 2030 are provisional and may be amended in future years as initiatives are implemented. All targets are shown in section 8.

6.2 ***Journey time and reliability***

6.2.1 Whilst data is available to measure journey times and the reliability of specific services, this is not something that has been regularly monitored within West Berkshire. The exception is the supported bus network emanating from Newbury which recorded punctuality by service since the contract started in 2016.

6.2.2 The Forum has considered a number of methods of recording this data, but as yet a specific relevant methodology has not been developed that will allow for meaningful targets that will record the impacts of interventions associated with the BSIP and EP.

6.2.3 Figure 4.5 shows current bus punctuality, based on the average of buses departing on time and being on time at intermediate stops, and is already reported to the Department for Transport (DfT). This has been fairly consistent for a number of years (excluding the increased reliability during the pandemic), but we will strive to improve this in the longer term. This reliability has also been consistently above the [national average](#), and that for non-metropolitan areas for more than a decade. We have set an overall target for reliability (bus punctuality), and a separate target for the Eastern Area, based on a specific route.

6.2.4 We continue to monitor services and seek to address problems where punctuality is below average. It may be that resolving issues on specific journeys, such as at peak times, or possibly those just after 9.30am when ENCTS pass holders begin travelling, could improve overall reliability of services.

6.2.5 We are aware that it is often factors outside the control of the bus operator or the Council that impact on reliability and journey times, such as emergency roadworks, or accidents, particularly events on the M4, which can rapidly lead to gridlock on West Berkshire roads. As part of ongoing monitoring, we will seek information on the most likely reasons for any abnormal delays.

6.2.6 Our 2023 survey showed a net satisfaction amongst bus users with reliability 51% (58% in 2021, 63% in 2022), and the time spent on the bus 57% (53%, 67%). Improvements could include:

- Additional buses / drivers to allow for congestion
- Increased off-bus ticket sales
- Increased use of non-cash purchasing on board (e.g. tap and go, contactless bank cards, smartcards, apps, multi-journey tickets)
- Bus priority at congestion hotspots
- Improved safety at accident black spots
- Better management of road works
- More direct services

| Targets | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | Target for 2024/25 | Target for 2029/30 |
|--------------------|--|---------|---------|---------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Journey time | Specific targets not set. Journey times will be reviewed by service. | | | | | |
| Reliability | | | | | | |
| Start | 89.1% | 88.8% | 94.0% | 91.5% | 90% | 92% |
| Overall | 85.4% | 83.8% | 89.1% | 84.9% | 85% | 87% |
| Eastern Area | Not recorded | | 88.3% | 86.2% | 86% | 88% |

Table 6.1 – Journey time and reliability targets

6.3 **Passenger growth and customer satisfaction**

6.3.1 Due to the impact of the pandemic, it is considered pragmatic to respond to the challenge of recovering passenger numbers in the early years, before seeking to deliver growth over the longer term. Until 2024 will therefore focus on delivering interventions that are likely to stabilise and recover patronage. This has not prevented us introducing improvements to the bus network during this time.

6.3.2 From 2025, patronage projections will account for further growth beyond the 2019/20 level. Separate targets are set for the Eastern Area as this is where most growth has been in recent years. We will seek to balance new services and improved frequencies with changing consumer habits, such as online shopping and working from home.

6.3.3 The Council usually takes part in the National Highways & Transport Network (NHT) survey every two years (in the odd years). A questionnaire is sent out to approximately 3,500 households within the district, from which around 20-30% are returned. There is no distinction between bus, and non-bus, users. We have consistently recorded around 59%-60% since 2015 (although this dropped to 56% in 2017).

6.3.4 We have also established our own satisfaction targets, which are obtained from our annual survey. The primary target will relate to satisfaction amongst current bus users. As satisfaction with the last journey made appears to be a better indicator, we will review the 2024 results and then re-base the future targets accordingly.

| Targets | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | Target for 2024/25 | Target for 2029/30 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Passenger numbers | | | | | | |
| Whole of WBC | 2,342,715 | 2,222,530 | 1,555,987 | 1,987,043 | 2,300,000 | 2,500,000 |
| Eastern Area (est.) | 1,020,320 | 968,025 | 702,548 | 816,537 | 1,000,000 | 1,050,000 |
| Average passenger satisfaction | | | | | | |
| Council survey (bus users) | No survey | | 65.9% | 59.7% (75.1%) | 67.9% | 69.9% |
| Council survey (all respondents) | No survey | | 46.8% | 43.6% (70.6%) | Not set | |
| NHT survey (all respondents) | 60% | n/a | 59% | 56% | 62% | 64% |

Note: The figures in brackets under the 2022/23 satisfaction results relate to last journey made satisfaction.

Table 6.2 – Passenger growth and customer satisfaction targets

6.3.5 Our survey does allow us to obtain satisfaction scores in different ways, based on how often they travel; as well as satisfaction scores with different elements of the journey experience (5.6).

6.4 **Vehicle emissions**

6.4.1 Environmental improvements are important in West Berkshire, and we have therefore set targets for engine emissions for buses used in the district. Whilst we recognise that zero emissions is the ideal, we have to consider the economics too, and therefore our targets are designed around improving engine emissions in the interim. We intend to bid for the DfT's ZEBRA2 (Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas) funding, and if successful we will update our emission targets.

| Targets | Pre-2022/23 | 2022/23 | Target for 2024/25 | Target for 2029/30 |
|-----------------------|--------------|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Other measures | | | | |
| Vehicle Emissions | Not recorded | 96% of vehicles at least Euro V 48.7% of vehicles at least Euro VI | All vehicles to be at least Euro V | All vehicles to be at least Euro VI |

Table 6.3 – Other targets

7. Delivery (from November 2021)

7.1 *What we are hoping to achieve*

- 7.1.1 If we are serious in our attempts to make bus travel a more attractive option in West Berkshire, in particular for those that do not currently use it, there are a number of initiatives that we would strive to implement. This section includes our aspirations, although we recognise that some will need to be given more priority than others, and that will be highlighted in our funding bids. Most of these will require external funding to make them a reality, and to allow them to become embedded, however they have been included in the hope that this funding will be forthcoming. Where aspirations refer to bus operations, this excludes those run under section 22 permits unless otherwise stated. Delivery priorities and scheme costs are shown in the associated funding documents submitted to the DfT. Where funding has been allocated by the DfT, it is referred to as part of the relevant text.
- 7.1.2 Cross-boundary services form a vital element of the overall offer for bus passengers in our area, particularly within Berkshire which consists of six unitary authorities. These services provide opportunities for our residents to access a wider range of employment, education and leisure facilities, alongside attracting commuters and visitors into the borough from the wider county and beyond.
- 7.1.3 We will continue to work closely with our partner local authorities, both through the development of the proposals set out within this document and the subsequent delivery of Enhanced Partnership arrangements with local operators. This collaborative working will build on existing arrangements such as the Berkshire Local Transport Body and Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum, which have co-ordinated and overseen the delivery of significant bus enhancements in recent years, including new mass rapid transit corridors and park & ride facilities, and the Thames Valley and North Hants study.
- 7.1.4 The on-going coordination of plans for enhanced services will focus on ensuring key destinations throughout the county are well served by high-quality bus services, both through the delivery of key new cross-boundary bus priority measures and associated service level enhancements. In addition, we are committed to achieving a more integrated sustainable transport network in Berkshire through enhanced connectivity with rail services and facilities for walking and cycling.
- 7.1.5 We are collectively focused on continuing to build back levels of bus patronage following the reduction during the pandemic, alongside attracting new passengers to subsequently further grow levels of bus usage. This is vital part of achieving our wider objectives relating to the economic recovery, decarbonisation and the delivery of housing through the creation of sustainable communities. It also forms part of the current discussions on the potential for a county devolution deal with the government.

7.2 *Service frequency*

- 7.2.1 Throughout section 5, it is highlighted that more frequent services are seen as the most necessary factor to encourage and improve bus travel. Figure 4.3 shows the current bus frequencies. The Eastern Area already benefits from services operating to higher frequencies, with early morning, evening and Sunday services, so many of the proposed changes are based elsewhere in West Berkshire.

7.2.2 Our plans in this area are to increase frequencies on the services in the table below, although it is recognised that pump-prime funding will be necessary to achieve most of these aspirations. We would also introduce journeys later than 7pm and introduce Sunday services outside of the Reading Buses commercial network.

| Current frequency | Proposed frequency | | Services |
|-------------------|--------------------|---------------|---|
| | 2025 | 2030 | |
| Every 12 mins | Every 10 minutes | | 26 (peak) |
| Every 15 mins | Every 10/12 mins | Every 10 mins | 26 (off-peak) |
| Every 20 mins | Every 15 mins | Every 12 mins | 16, 33 |
| Every 30 mins | Every 20 mins | Every 15 mins | Jet Black 1, Lime 2/a |
| Every hour | Every 30 mins | Every 20 mins | 1a, 1c, 2, 8, 9, 15 (off-peak), 103, The Link |
| Every 2 hours | Every hour | Every 30 mins | 143 Pangbourne to Reading |
| Every 2 hours | Every hour | | 3, 4, 6 |
| Every 2 hours | Demand-responsive | | 143 Upper Basildon to Pangbourne |
| Less frequent | Demand-responsive | | 5, 5a, 5c, 6a, 41, 44 |

Table 7.1 – Ideal frequencies

7.2.3 Specific changes we would introduce include:

- **The Link:** An increased frequency is supported by both the operator, and championed by the Transport for South East Inner Orbital Study. As well as a half-hourly frequency, we would like to see later evening journeys and a Sunday service.
- **Lime 2:** Increased frequency, especially during the evening peak period. A two-hourly Sunday service for Mortimer was introduced in September 2023.
- **Jet Black 1:** Increased late evening journeys (particularly between Newbury and Thatcham) are supported by the operator, and would benefit the night time economy. Initial enhancements would be to Friday and Saturday evenings, which were introduced in September 2023.
- **Pangbourne-Reading:** An improved frequency between Reading and Pangbourne, but this would be dependent upon a bus turning circle being provided in Pangbourne. This could either be an enhancement of service 143, or an extension of service 16 from Purley. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable this.
- **Newbury contracted network (2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9):** Because of limited resource availability, these services are inter-worked by five buses, restricting frequencies and making departure times less convenient for passengers on some services. We would also seek to run later journeys, at least on Fridays and Saturdays which would include an hourly evening service on services 2, 8, and 9, and a return evening journey on services 3, 4, and 6.
- **Reading services:** Restoration of frequencies where they have been reduced due to the impacts of the covid pandemic. All except service 33 (was every 15 minutes), and service 26 (was every 20 minutes on Sundays) have now been restored.
- **103:** This is currently a Monday to Friday service, financially supported by Greenham Common Trust. A Saturday service would be useful and would also allow for a review of this route and others in south Newbury. There are several attractors at Greenham Park, including the Base café and Arts Centre, the

Peace Garden (established by the Greenham Peace Women), and access to Greenham Common, now a designated public parkland.

- **Sunday services:** We would like to introduce a Sunday service, at least within the Newbury / Thatcham area.

7.3 **New services**

7.3.1 Whilst improving frequencies and times / days of operation will be of benefit where bus services exist, it will do nothing for the areas where they do not. The rural nature of much of West Berkshire, and the relatively small rural settlements have led to many areas losing their bus links over time. In addition, there are definite benefits in linking key areas with fast, direct buses, especially along the north-south corridor where no direct rail links exist.

7.3.2 Areas where we see the need for new services include:

- **Newbury to Harwell and Didcot:** This proposed service was introduced in July 2023. It provides an alternative to the 20-minute car journey or the two trains and a bus (at least 90 minutes) required to travel between Newbury and Harwell. It provides for connections to Oxford and Wantage. Funding has been provided by the DfT and Harwell to enable this.
- **Donnington Heights:** Together with Shaw Valley, this provides new housing just north of Newbury, adjacent to the Vodafone campus. As Vodafone no longer require as much office space, they have reduced their bus operations to one service. Flows for the housing developments and the Vodafone campus would be complimentary.
- **Mortimer Station:** The station is a little way from the village, and only has a small car park, leading people to park on the rural approach roads. A peak-time shuttle from Mortimer, Beech Hill and other nearby settlements would improve this situation. The station is also included in our DRT plans.
- **Thatcham Station:** This station is similarly remote from most Thatcham residents. A minibus service linking the station to north Thatcham is seen as a high priority.
- **Hambridge Road, Newbury:** This is a large industrial area between Newbury and Thatcham that has no bus service.
- **Rural areas:** Within the more rural areas of the district, where no services have operated for a number of years, we are investigating DRT options. More details are given in the following section.

7.4 **Demand responsive services**

7.4.1 Following a study into demand responsive transport (DRT) within West Berkshire, we now have a better understanding of the resources required, including the technology available, and the level of service that we should be providing. We were unsuccessful in our bids to the Rural Mobility Fund, however funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable some of these routes. We have successfully completed a tender for the Liftango app, and we are aiming to roll out our first new DRT for 20 years before the end of 2023.

7.4.2 The areas we are looking at include:

- **A. North West:** This will be our first scheme. It will convert services 5, 5a and 5c to villages including Brightwalton, Chaddleworth, Leckhampstead and Peasemore, allowing for wider coverage, to include Farnborough, Fawley, and Winterbourne which currently have no bus service, as well as provide more journey options than currently exist. Ideally, a Saturday service can also be added in due course.
- **B. North East:** Once experience has been gained, we will introduce this scheme. It will cover the area bounded by the B4009 to the west and A4 to the south. It will include the villages of Aldworth, Ashampstead, Bradfield, Bucklebury, Englefield, Frilsham, Hampstead Norreys, Lower Basildon, Stanford Dingley, Streatley, Tidmarsh, Upper Basildon, Woolhampton and Yattendon. Many of these villages have no bus service. This service will be most beneficial with a bus turning circle in Pangbourne. The existing 143 could then focus its resource on the main Pangbourne to Reading corridor, with DRT used to link in with this, and increase the journey opportunities. This service is also covered by DfT funding. It may enable us to improve the existing 41 service.
- **C. South East:** This includes the villages of Aldermaston, Beech Hill, Padworth, Stratfield Mortimer and Sulhamstead. Current bus services in this area (where they exist) do not provide all direct links that residents would like to make. It should enable us to improve the existing 44 service.
- **D. West:** Operating between Lambourn and Hungerford, this includes the villages of Eastbury, East Garston, Great Shefford, Hungerford Newtown, Lambourn Woodlands, Shefford Woodlands, Wickham, Weston and Woodlands St Mary, replacing a service that last operated in 2016. It may also be able to provide a more appropriate off-peak service between Hungerford, Inkpen, Kintbury and Newbury.

7.5 **Bus priority**

- 7.5.1 The road network in West Berkshire does not lend itself easily to the installation of bus lanes, and therefore the focus to date has been on bus gates in different forms to give clear advantages to buses over car use. In Newbury, for example, there are limited north-south routes for local traffic. Northbrook Street through the shopping centre is pedestrianised for most of the day; Park Way has a bridge over the Kennet & Avon Canal which is restricted to local buses, taxis and bicycles; leaving only the A339 for general traffic. Any delays along this route can quickly spread to nearby roads and block the A4 in both directions towards Thatcham and Speen.
- 7.5.2 Bus gates operate in a number of different ways in West Berkshire. We will also seek more use of ANPR cameras where enforcement is difficult. This includes a camera on the new bus link from Love Lane to Donnington Heights in Newbury.
- 7.5.3 Paragraph 4.5.3 shows the currently identified congestion hotspots throughout the district, and some of these have been on the list for a long time, with no obvious solution. We have started to introduce bus stop clearways at many of these locations which may relieve congestion at some sites. Other sites may require more controversial solutions including more complex highways works rather than specific bus priority. Where possible we would also seek to address active travel issues as part of any improvements. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable these solutions to be investigated.

7.5.4 Areas of bus priority that we wish to pursue include. Again, where active travel improvements can be made at the same time as improving bus travel, these will be implemented:

- **Pangbourne:** There has been a long-held ambition to increase bus services between Pangbourne and Reading, as for many the station is too far away for them to give up their car. Unfortunately, there is no obvious place to turn a bus within Pangbourne, as the buildings are close to the road; the residential roads have limited off-street parking; and the low railway bridge on Station Road prevents double deck vehicles accessing the station. One possible solution is to create a bus turning circle through Station Road car park, although other solutions may be feasible. This would allow for an increased frequency on service 143, or an extension of service 16 from Purley, and give a greater business case to DRT solution B in paragraph 7.4.2. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable this.
- **A4 Bath Road:** The commercial Jet Black 1 can experience delays along the A4 from the Reading boundary to the M4 junction 12 roundabout. There is not considered to be the physical road space for bus lanes throughout, however we will conduct a feasibility study to examine this in more detail, as well as other measures such as traffic light priority. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable this. A more expensive solution to crossing the M4 would involve replacing the existing pedestrian bridge between Pincents Lane, Calcot and Theale High Street with a new bridge capable of allowing bus and active travel movements.
- **Robin Hood Roundabout:** Similarly, towards the other end of the Jet Black 1 route in Newbury, traffic can become blocked on the A4 London Road and the B4009 Shaw Road, also affecting services 1a and 1c between Newbury and Thatcham. This junction is subject to review to enable it to cope with additional traffic flows from new housing developments, as well as incorporating improved active travel links. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable changes to also positively affect bus services.
- **Atherton Road, Hungerford:** This road is used as part of a one-way loop for buses to access the terminal point in Church Street. The road has now been improved by tackling overgrown vegetation and the DfT funding has been reallocated elsewhere.
- **Mortimer Station:** The station in Mortimer is a little over one mile from the nearest bus stop. If a facility can be put in for a turning circle near the station, it will enable local residents to access trains to both Reading and Basingstoke.

7.6 ***Bus rapid transit / superbus network***

7.6.1 Any such network would be more relevant to the Eastern Area, characterised already by high frequency, all-day commercial bus services, dense population levels, and the proximity to Reading. This will be considered along the A4 in Calcot, together with an alternative of using the existing service 26 route (which already includes bus gates). This would be considered essential if any plans are developed for a Park and Ride site in the vicinity of the M4, junction 12.

7.6.2 A Superbus network provides higher frequency, lower fare services. Similar to bus rapid transit, we have no current plans for this as we need to improve services

overall first. Again, any scheme would be most likely to work best in the Eastern Area. We would therefore support any bid made by Reading Borough Council subject to funding.

7.7 Integration with other modes

- 7.7.1 Paragraph 7.3.2 mentions the need for dedicated new services to Mortimer and Thatcham stations. Theale Station is also a short distance from the main population centre and may benefit from a shuttle service, linking the population centres and Arlington Business Park to the station.
- 7.7.2 Paragraph 4.8.2 highlights that additional vehicles added to the network (which will also improve bus frequencies) will enable more services to call directly at Newbury station. Operators will review existing services, but there is agreement to highlight more clearly the nearest bus stops, and the walking link between them and the station. An RTPI screen has been installed at Newbury Station, which gives information on services stopping nearby, as well as those directly outside.
- 7.7.3 We have had discussions with Great Western Railway (GWR) about better signposting and the possibility of adding some bus services to the rail network as “bus branch lines”, in line with their internal Integrated Transport Strategy document. We have been unsuccessful in bids for the heavily oversubscribed Great Western Rail Community Fund each year.
- 7.7.4 Given the frequency of bus services in much of West Berkshire, linking bus journeys to train timetables is difficult, especially taking account of occasional disruption on the rail network. The majority of bus services emanating from Newbury are focussed on school movements, which need to be catered for, as these students represent a very high proportion of all passenger journeys in the area.
- 7.7.5 There is currently one long-distance coach service stopping in West Berkshire. Two of the six departure bays in the Wharf Bus Station are dedicated for coach use, allowing integration with bus services. Coach excursions and tours call at the bus station. We will encourage National Express to consider resuming other services that provide links to London, Heathrow Airport, the South Coast, Oxford and Birmingham when they are able to, but this will not be before 2024. We will also seek interest from other national coach operators.
- 7.7.6 Bicycle racks are available adjacent to the Wharf Bus Station for those wishing to travel further afield. We have no current plans to allow bicycles to be carried on buses, however we will keep this option under review.
- 7.7.7 As mentioned in paragraph 4.8.4, community transport is an important part of the passenger transport network in West Berkshire, and we will continue to support the groups and highlight their services to those who may struggle to use local buses. With Council support, Volunteer Centre West Berkshire, through their Handybus operation have expanded their operations, and Downlands Volunteer Group will take delivery of their first wheelchair-accessible minibus later this year. The latter is notable for also being the first electric community transport minibus in Berkshire.

7.8 ***Simplify services***

- 7.8.1 Many urban areas of Newbury are only served by the infrequent rural routes that pass through them. The buses interwork between these services to get maximum operating efficiency with minimum resources. This is not ideal as frequencies are lower than where dedicated urban services exist. Examples of this include service 3 in West Fields, service 4 in Speen, and service 6 in Donnington. Ideally, additional resource will allow us to have more dedicated urban services, as well as slightly improving journey times on the longer-distance routes.
- 7.8.2 Route numbers throughout the district are mostly distinct, with the exception of route number 2. There are three services with this number in West Berkshire: Newbury & District 2 Newbury to Wash Common and Pigeons Farm; Stagecoach 2 Baughurst to Basingstoke; and Reading Buses Lime 2/2a Reading to Burghfield and Mortimer. The different areas these serve, together with the names and branding of the latter, ensure that there is no confusion to the public.
- 7.8.3 Service numbers within Newbury were reviewed 20 years ago to give them a higher prominence in the town, with numbers from 1 upwards, rather than 104, 113, 146 etc. From 2016, a number of route variations were given separate letters (e.g. 4, 4a, 4b, 4c), to make it easier for users to identify that particular roads or villages are not served by all journeys. Additional resource should enable us to remove some of these variations.

7.9 ***Socially necessary services***

- 7.9.1 Despite most local bus services only operating due to subsidy, the Council now only has one tendered contract (Newbury services). It financially supports two further routes –1a/1c and 143. A number of other services are also operated directly by the Council using section 22 permits.
- 7.9.2 The Newbury contract began in 2016 following a reduction in funds available for bus services and required four vehicles to be interworked to cover five distinct services. Developer funding has allowed a further bus (and service) to be added to this, allowing more recovery time on longer-distance journeys. This contract has been extended to run until the end of August 2024. It allows for additional buses to be added at an agreed price, and therefore we are able to implement improvements quickly with additional funding in place. This contract is currently being re-tendered, for a further eight years.
- 7.9.3 Quarterly meetings take place between the Council and the operator, Newbury & District, which are also attended by Reading Buses staff. This gives us the opportunity to discuss issues relating to most bus services in the district, contracted and commercial, to ensure that they are still effective.
- 7.9.4 All contracts, including those for services 1a/1c and 143, now expire at the end of August 2024 to allow a co-ordinated approach to take place to review continued operations.
- 7.9.5 By their nature, these services are not commercial. Table 4.4 highlights that almost £2m of non-direct bus fare revenue is invested each year to keep these services going. Whilst improvements that increase passenger levels may reduce the ongoing cost required, it is not expected that many of these services could ever become

truly commercial. It is vital, therefore, that ongoing funding is provided, and any improvements made as part of the National Bus Strategy are funded for long enough to allow for commercial operation, or for the business case to be fully established for continued funding.

7.10 ***Lower and simplified fares***

- 7.10.1 Operators of commercial services feel that their fares already offer good value for money, and so they are reluctant to look at reducing them permanently. Fare reductions may also impact on the services' commercial viability.
- 7.10.2 Operators are, however, keen to introduce fare capping, most likely by introducing tap-on, tap-off technology once all operators have compatible ticketing technology, which we would like to see introduced as soon as possible. This will also include the Council's own section 22 operations. It is important that the software behind tap-on, tap-off is able to apportion revenue fairly between operators, which is being looked into by the DfT as it will impact cross-boundary services. Funding has been allocated by the DfT to enable this.
- 7.10.3 The Council is looking at fares on its supported bus services. As part of this review, it is hoped to move towards a simple, easily understood zonal fare structure rather than the current tapering fare charts. At the same time, it is hoped that fares for many can be reduced in a way that could attract new, and more frequent use. This plan is currently on hold during the national fare cap, however it is still our intention to introduce a zonal fares scheme for period tickets.
- 7.10.4 We will standardise the reduced price tickets between commercial and contracted operations, including the age limits such tickets relate to (i.e. young people). We support calls for regional and national uniformity of such tickets. No later than January 2023, operators had clear information on fares charged on their websites, including for young people. All operators allow accompanied under-fives to travel free and provide reduced fares until a person reaches 17. They also provide reduced price termly passes for those attending educational establishments. Reading Buses go further with reduced price options for under 19s, or 19- to 21-year-olds at specified local colleges and universities.
- 7.10.5 At the Forum meeting in October 2022, operators agreed to introduce "Early Bird" tickets from January 2023 on a trial basis. These tickets allow those with ENCTS passes to travel before 9.30am Mondays to Fridays for a discounted, but harmonised, fare. They proved so successful that they have now agreed to continue offering these tickets on a permanent commercial basis.
- 7.10.6 Discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) regarding options for job seekers tickets for those looking for work were held however this has not resulted in meaningful progress.
- 7.10.7 We also commit to allowing people to continue to pay for bus fares by cash, whilst supporting alternative payment methods. We recognise that for some people, removing this option will be a barrier to using the bus.
- 7.10.8 Since 2021 a number of 'free travel' bus days have taken place. These have been in the run-up to Christmas each year, during the Easter and Jubilee weekends in 2022, and on World Car Free Day in September 2022 and 2023. From September

2022, this has allowed for free return travel to places outside West Berkshire rather than just on journeys originating in the area. These events have proved popular and have led to patronage growth and will be offered periodically in the future.



Figure 7.1 – Advertising for ‘free travel’ days

7.10.9 From January 2023, reduced price tickets (£2 cap per journey) have been available daily on most bus services as part of the national single fare cap scheme. These will continue until at least December 2024.

7.11 Integrated ticketing between operators and different transport modes

7.11.1 Operators are in agreement that day and period passes and multi-journey tickets should be available for all bus travel. As such, the Council will expand use of its Connect tickets (for Newbury-centred services), and also work with operators to implement joint ticketing in the Eastern Area, for example between Reading Buses service 16 and Thames Travel service 143.

7.11.2 Within Newbury / Thatcham, there is currently no all-operator day ticket other than the Connect Day which covers most of West Berkshire. The Council will therefore introduce a Connect Day Urban ticket which is more compatible with fares in the area. We will also be looking at introducing zonal day and period tickets (7.10.3).

7.11.3 In summer 2022, we introduced a multi-operator Group ticket (in both urban and rural versions) allowing one day's bus travel for up to four people. The rural ticket was launched with an introductory price to boost take-up.

7.11.4 We will continue to support the PlusBus scheme. We will support developments that allow the purchase of tickets on buses that can then be used on the rail network, rather than the necessity to purchase a through ticket in advance so that it has time to be delivered to the user, or the need to purchase a separate bus ticket for the outward journey.

7.11.5 Funding for integrated ticketing has been allocated by the DfT.

7.12 **Vehicles and infrastructure**

7.12.1 We will expect that all buses have working next stop audio-visual announcements, Wi-Fi and USB charging facilities, with the latter facilities expected as standard by younger people. Reading Buses' successful Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) '[Completing the Connection](#)' bid has helped, and we would wish to support similar bids for other operators.

7.12.2 Vehicles will all provide level boarding. We have asked operators to provide information on where it can be difficult for buses to access stops, so that we can implement measures to assist (e.g. bus stop clearways, parking restrictions). Busier stops have Kassel Kerbs and more rural stops will have hard standing to provide a safe place to board or alight from the bus. At the September 2023 Forum operators requested that we no longer use raised (e.g. Kassel) kerbs as vehicles are now sufficiently low as not to need them, and they can cause more damage to buses.

7.12.3 We will support the introduction of additional bus shelters. The 2021 customer survey responses included requests for shelters in Burghfield, Lambourn and Mortimer, and one nearer the shops in Pangbourne. Ownership and maintenance of shelters resides with the respective Town or Parish Councils, and all of these Parish Councils have been supportive. It can be difficult to persuade some areas to take on this responsibility, however we will work with these to encourage investment. We are aware of some bus shelters available offering green roofs (roof gardens) which may prove more popular with both residents and Town and Parish Councils.



Figure 7.2 – Level boarding and new bus shelters

7.12.4 Given the low level and declining satisfaction with the passenger waiting environment (5.8), we will examine ways to introduce better facilities including more shelters across West Berkshire.

7.12.5 An increase in bus frequencies will require replanning of services using The Wharf Bus Station in Newbury. We will also consider whether enhancements can be made to improve passenger facilities, and how to accommodate any additional stops required in the vicinity, particularly for non-terminating services, perhaps by realigning existing roads.

7.13 **Passenger safety**

7.13.1 We will expect that all buses have working CCTV to record images in the event of an incident on board. CCTV also covers the Wharf Bus Station in Newbury.

7.13.2 We have received requests for improved lighting at some bus stops where early morning and evening services stop, and we will look at what can be done at these locations. We will investigate solar panels / battery storage that can be installed in more remote areas as a cost-effective solution.

7.14 **Buses for tourists**

7.14.1 West Berkshire is notable for its large Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and many of its towns and villages are tourist attractions in their own right. Hungerford is known for its antiques; Lambourn as a centre for racehorse training and home to several famous jockeys; and Pangbourne as a picturesque village on the River Thames, and home to author Kenneth Grahame. There are a number of other attractions too, including:

- Falkland Islands Memorial Chapel at Pangbourne College
- Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails along the northern boundary of West Berkshire
- Kennet and Avon Canal and River Kennet running the length of the district just south of the A4
- Basildon House (National Trust) and Beale Park Wildlife Centre in Lower Basildon

7.14.2 In addition there are numerous footpaths, Newbury Racecourse, and many fairs and festivals. We will produce information to promote bus access where possible, and work with attractors to seek discounted travel for visitors, including places both outside West Berkshire but accessible by a bus originating in the district.

7.15 **Decarbonisation and zero emissions**

7.15.1 The major bus groups Stagecoach and Go Ahead have their own plans to decarbonise their buses, with both aiming to have zero emission UK bus fleets by 2035. In addition, the Council's [Environment Strategy](#) seeks to make the district carbon neutral by 2030.

7.15.2 We will support bus companies to replace their older and most polluting vehicles with zero emissions ones and support any further bids to the DfT's Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA), or alternative, schemes. We will also support non-ZE upgrades and have set targets for this. We are particularly keen to support buses

that pass through either of the district's AQMAs, although the benefits here are only likely to ensue if car drivers then switch to these buses. A key part of vehicle upgrades is likely to involve retrofitting improved engines to existing buses.

7.15.3 We are particularly keen to work with our neighbouring Berkshire authorities in relation to the introduction of ZE buses and associated infrastructure, which may take the form of a County Deal.

7.15.4 We are also keen to explore whether the Council can fund or facilitate carbon-neutral refuelling stations, whether that is electricity, hydrogen, or other alternatives, although this is likely to be a longer-term initiative.

7.15.5 As part of the tender for our Newbury-based bus contract in 2024, all bidders have confirmed their desire to work with us on a bid for ZEBRA 2 funding for the vehicles to be used on the contract. The Council will be looking at bidding for ZEBRA 2 funding for Newbury-based buses, with Reading-based buses part of a separate bid by Reading Borough Council. Oxfordshire's successful ZEBRA bid will mean that less polluting vehicles from Oxford will be cascaded to Thames Travel which will improve vehicle emissions in West Berkshire.

7.16 *Passenger charter*

7.16.1 The Forum has developed a [West Berkshire Bus Passenger Charter](#) which is published on partner websites and in the Council's Travel Guide (7.18.1). It is short, simple, and easily understood. It includes Council and operator commitments, required passenger behaviour, and how to provide feedback or register a complaint.

7.16.2 We are aware that the DfT and Transport Focus are seeking the development of a national passenger charter and will encourage our operators to adopt this if it comes to fruition for consistency across the country.

7.17 *Network identity*

7.17.1 Bus services within West Berkshire tend to operate in clusters – the west of the district into Swindon and Wiltshire, centrally from Newbury, and in the Eastern Area. Rather than seek to introduce a "West Berkshire" branded network, we will give the local identity through the Council's publicity, ticketing, and passenger charter. The Council has been using *Connect* branding for a number of years. It is included on all our publicity including the Travel Guide and roadside timetable displays; it is the name of our multi-operator tickets; and it is displayed prominently on the Council's section 22-operated vehicles. We will consider whether it is time to refresh the Connect branding.

7.17.2 Network identities are different in each part of the district:

- **West:** These services are tendered by Wiltshire and Swindon Councils (other than service 47, operated under the Connect name) and are in the operator's livery. As these services have very little mileage in West Berkshire, we would not seek to impose any conditions on their operations.
- **Central / Newbury:** Other than the two Stagecoach services from the south and one Thames Travel service from the north, buses here have had a variety of liveries over the years dependent upon the operator at the time. Within the last few years, this position has stabilised with the purchase of Newbury & District by

Reading Buses, and all vehicles are now in the distinctive, and smart, Newbury & District livery, which also helps vehicles to appear new – a definite bonus for bus travel.

- **Eastern Area / Reading:** For many years now, Reading Buses have been using a standard livery layout, but in different colours for different services. This approach obviously works as passenger numbers have been growing in recent years against the national trend.

7.18 **Information**

7.18.1 Information in West Berkshire is reasonably good with the District-wide Travel Guide, at stop information, operators own information, apps and some RTPI. This is OK if you know where to find it, and we would like to improve this.

- **Travel Guide:** We have resumed printing and distribution of this informative guide following a hiatus since 2018 for a variety of factors. It is also available on the [Council website](#).
- **Public Transport Map:** This has not been printed for a number of years, but we will consider whether a printed version is valuable for existing and potential users. It is also available on the [Council website](#).
- **Bus stop displays:** Although many stops already have timetable cases displaying current departure times, we will increase this to cover all stops where passengers are likely to board. We will also add QR codes to each display to allow users to link directly to real time information on their bus.
- **RTPI:** We will install more RTPI screens at key stops so that those without access to a smartphone can still see when the next bus will arrive. This will include additional stops in Newbury and Thatcham, as well as Burghfield, Compton, Hungerford, Lambourn, Mortimer and Pangbourne. Two screens in Thatcham and one in Theale were upgraded in 2022, and a new screen added at Newbury Rail Station. We would like more of the Papercast-style screens as they can provide more information than a standard bus stop display.
- **BODS:** All of our operators are providing data to BODS, which is used to populate journey planners including Traveline. The Council will ensure this information is provided for section 22 operations. In future, this information will include not only timetables, but fare information, vehicle locations, and details of punctuality.
- **Websites / Apps / Social Media:** All major operators have their own websites and apps and make use of social media. The Council will review its own website to include links to these where this will add more information than is available directly from the Council. We will also investigate an app for all bus travel, possibly as part of a wider multi-modal app to provide more choice for travellers.
- **On bus:** All vehicles will have working audio-visual next stop announcements.
- **Individual service timetables:** Although these are not often produced on their own, within the Travel Guide we will add more information to each bus service to highlight the relevant community transport options for those unable to use conventional buses.
- **Information of interest:** As noted in section 7.14, buses could be used to reach many leisure facilities, and we will provide information that will help boost this type of travel.

- **Passenger charter:** A passenger charter has been published within our Travel Guide and on our website explaining what customers can expect, and what redress they have when these standards are not met.

7.18.2 One thing that has not happened in any consistent way in West Berkshire is marketing of bus services and their benefits. We commit to changing this philosophy so that we actually make people aware of what is available and encourage use (5.7). We will seek to be ambitious with this marketing using a variety of different initiatives and techniques. This will range from press releases to reduced price (or even free) travel for specific events or to target different users. Figure 7.1 shows a number of different posters and promotional messages we have used to advertise free bus travel.

7.19 **Community transport**

7.19.1 We have highlighted that community transport provides an important link in the transport provision in West Berkshire (4.8.4) and we will continue to support and promote this for those unable to use conventional buses.

7.19.2 We have facilitated additional resources in the Newbury / Hospital / Thatcham area working with Volunteer Centre West Berkshire, as well as Berkshire's first electric community transport minibus in the Downlands.

7.20 **Shared car use**

7.20.1 We will work with the Council's Transport Policy team to seek expansion of the current [car club](#) to provide additional options, especially where DRT is not currently planned. The car club currently provides 24-hour access to hire cars in Newbury.

7.20.2 Trials are also partnered with Liftshare to promote car sharing in Chaddleworth, East Garston, Great Shefford and Hungerford. It is hoped that the scheme can be expanded in the future to more remote areas.

7.21 **Parking**

7.21.1 For a rural area, there must be a trade-off between affordable, accessible parking and the cost of bus services. This is especially important when town centres are seeing reduced footfall from more home working and shops closing down as internet shopping becomes more the norm. A draft Parking Strategy is out for consultation which considers these factors, including proposals in the Newbury Town Centre Masterplan to reduce the number of central Newbury parking spaces.

8. Reporting and Overview Table

8.1 We will report on the targets set within the BSIP at least every six months, and this information will be published, on the Council's dedicated webpage:
<https://www.westberks.gov.uk/enhancedpartnership>.

8.2 The following table summarises the key outputs of the BSIP, and how these meet the requirements set out in the [National Bus Strategy](#). This gives an overview of the commitments which the Council and bus operators will work towards to improve local bus services.

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of authority or authorities: | West Berkshire Council |
| Franchising or Enhanced Partnership (or both): | Enhanced Partnership |
| Date of publication: | October 2023 |
| Date of next annual update: | October 2024 |
| URL of published report: | https://www.westberks.gov.uk/enhancedpartnership |

| Targets | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | Target for 2024/25 | Target for 2029/30 | Description of how each will be measured (max 50 words) |
|---------------------------------------|--|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|--|
| Journey time | Specific targets not set. Journey times will be reviewed by service. | | | | We will examine all services to identify where reliability is lower, and then look at variance on individual journey times. |
| Reliability | | | | | This measures journeys departing from their first stop, and across the whole route using standard methodology (on time is 1 minute early to 5 minutes 59 seconds late). Information will be obtained directly from operators or from BODS. |
| Start | 89.1% | 88.8% | 90% | 92% | |
| Overall | 85.4% | 83.8% | 85% | 87% | |
| Passenger numbers | | | | | From Passenger counts submitted by the operators from information drawn from their ticket machines. |
| Whole of WBC | 2,342,715 | 2,222,530 | 2,300,000 | 2,500,000 | |
| Eastern Area (est.) | 1,020,320 | 968,025 | 1,000,000 | 1,050,000 | |
| Average passenger satisfaction | | | | | The Council survey data is taken from annual consultation. The NHT measure uses KBI06 Local Bus Services satisfaction. |
| Council survey (bus users) | No survey | | 67.9% | 69.9% | |
| NHT survey (all respondents) | 60% | 59% | 62% | 64% | |

| Targets | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | Target for 2024/25 | Target for 2029/30 | Description of how each will be measured (max 50 words) |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Other measures | | | | | |
| Vehicle Emissions | Not recorded | Not recorded | All vehicles to be at least Euro V | All vehicles to be at least Euro VI | Information on vehicles used will be provided by operators. |

| Delivery - Does your BSIP detail policies to: | Yes/No | Explanation (max 50 words) |
|--|--------|---|
| Make improvements to bus services and planning | | |
| <i>More frequent and reliable services</i> | | |
| Review service frequency | Yes | Working with bus operators, we have identified routes that would attract more passengers if frequencies were enhanced. This includes the addition of evening and Sunday services and some new and reinstated links in the network. These would all require additional funding to implement. |
| Increase bus priority measures | Yes | Working with bus operators, we have identified sites where bus priority would reduce delays to bus services. We have also identified that a bus turning circle in Pangbourne would allow for improved frequency to be one service, however further feasibility is required to identify a suitable location for this. DfT funding has been allocated for this. |
| Increase demand responsive services | Yes | Many rural parts of the district currently have no, or a very minimal bus service. We believe these areas would be best served by DRT. Additional funding will be required to implement any of these schemes and some DfT funding has been allocated. |
| Consideration of bus rapid transport networks | Yes | Such networks may be applicable in the Eastern Area of the district. If so, we would work with Reading Buses and Reading Borough Council to achieve such ambitions for the commercial bus services here. |
| <i>Improvements to planning / integration with other modes</i> | | |
| Integrate services with other transport modes | Yes | We have identified areas where bus services could be provided to rail stations. If additional resources are put in, it will also be possible for more services to serve Newbury rail station. We are discussing options with GWR to add some services to the rail network as "bus branch lines". |
| Simplify services | Yes | With additional resource, we would be able to improve the urban bus network around Newbury, so that longer-distance rural services could operate more directly to their ultimate destinations. |

| Delivery - Does your BSIP detail policies to: | Yes/No | Explanation (max 50 words) |
|---|--------|---|
| Review socially necessary services | Yes | The Council-contracted Newbury services are reviewed regularly with monthly information provided on patronage and reliability, allowing for minor adjustments to timetables. |
| Invest in Superbus networks | Yes | Such networks may be applicable in the Eastern Area of the district. If so, we would work with Reading Buses and Reading Borough Council to achieve such ambitions for the commercial bus services here. |
| <i>Improvements to fares and ticketing</i> | | |
| Lower fares | Yes | <p>Whilst operators believe their fares to already be good value, the Council are reviewing lower and/ or simplified fares. We are also using promotional fares to stimulate growth.</p> <p>Operators are keen on fare-capping, which should be multi-operator. The Council is also looking at standardising age-based reduced fares between the supported network and commercial operations.</p> |
| Simplify fares | Yes | <p>We are also committed to retaining cash as a payment method for those who rely on this.</p> <p>DfT funding has been allocated to support this and ticketing improvements.</p> |
| Integrate ticketing between operators and different transport modes | Yes | We are committed to expanding the multi-operator Connect tickets to all Newbury-based operations and seeking similar arrangements in the Eastern Area. As part of this we will introduce a Newbury / Thatcham day ticket. Group tickets have recently been introduced. We support PlusBus and will work with GWR to make this more accessible. |
| Make improvements to bus passenger experience | | |
| <i>Higher spec buses</i> | | |
| Invest in improved bus specifications | Yes | All buses will offer level boarding in urban areas, and more rural stops will benefit from hard standing. Vehicles will have working audio-visual announcements, Wi-Fi, and USB charging facilities as standard. |
| Invest in accessible and inclusive bus services | Yes | Additional bus shelters will be installed in rural locations. Further RTPi screens will also be added at key stops, together with QR codes on all roadside displays to identify how far away the next bus is. |
| Protect personal safety of bus passengers | Yes | Available funding would be used to ensure all bus services have working CCTV. Lighting will be improved at bus stops, and we will investigate solar panels, in particular for more remote rural areas. |

| Delivery - Does your BSIP detail policies to: | Yes/No | Explanation (max 50 words) |
|---|--------|---|
| Improve buses for tourists | Yes | <p>We will promote access to the countryside and towns and villages in West Berkshire by bus. This includes access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Footpaths including the National Trails (a major strength of West Berkshire – its vast area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) • Tourist attractions • Special events • Days out in general |
| Invest in decarbonisation | Yes | <p>We will support any bids for ZEBRA (or similar) funding, and the use of zero-emission, zero-carbon buses, although funding will be required for both infrastructure and the additional costs of the vehicles themselves. We will assess future bus tenders taking account of using these vehicles.</p> |
| <i>Improvements to passenger engagement</i> | | |
| Passenger charter | Yes | <p>We are committed to producing a simple, readily understood and short passenger charter that encompasses all bus services. This will consist of service standards that could reasonably be expected, and the redress available when these standards are not met.</p> |
| Strengthen network identity | Yes | <p>The brands used to identify bus services and networks are considered strong in West Berkshire, and there are no plans to change these. The West Berkshire brand is <i>Connect</i> which is used in the names of multi-operator tickets, on Council section 22 vehicles and in publicity / information.</p> |
| Improve bus information | Yes | <p>The Council's Travel Guide is already 'Outstanding', and we will recommence printing of this. We will also improve many other aspects of our information, including QR codes and RTPi for those waiting for buses. More importantly, with additional funding, we will market and promote what is available.</p> |
| Other | | |
| Other | | |
| Community Transport | Yes | <p>We will continue to support and promote community transport as an alternative for those who are unable to use conventional bus services.</p> |
| Parking | Yes | <p>We will develop and publish a Parking Strategy for West Berkshire that will take account of changing consumer habits, the environment, and the desire to encourage more use of public transport.</p> |

Glossary

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| AONB | Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty |
| AQMA | Air Quality Management Area |
| BODS | Bus Operator Data Service |
| BSIP | Bus Service Improvement Plan |
| BSOG | Bus Services Operators Grant |
| DfT | Department for Transport |
| DRT | Demand Responsive Transport |
| DWP | Department for Work and Pensions |
| ENCTS | English National Concessionary Travel Scheme |
| EP | Enhanced Partnership |
| Forum | Enhanced Partnership Forum |
| GWR | Great Western Railway |
| LEP | Local Enterprise Partnership |
| LTP | West Berkshire Local Transport Plan 2011-2026 |
| NHT | National Highways & Transport Network |
| NO ₂ | Nitrogen dioxide |
| nomis | Official Labour Market statistics |
| ONS | Office for National Statistics |
| QR | Quick Response matrix barcode |
| RTPI | Real Time Passenger Information |
| Section 22 | The Transport Act 1985 allows not-for-profit organisations to operate without the need for a full public service vehicle operator's licence. They are not subject to many of the normal licensing or legislative requirements. |
| ZE | Zero emission |
| ZEBRA | Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas |

Appendices

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Other relevant documentation

[West Berkshire Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme](#)