

From: Simon Jones, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Neil Baker, Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport

Subject: **Kent Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) – 2024 Refresh**

Key Decision: **Yes**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: **Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee 21 May 2024**

Future Pathway of Paper: **For Cabinet Member Decision**

Electoral Divisions Affected: **All**

Summary:

In October 2021, KCC submitted its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to the DfT in response to the Government's National Bus Strategy (NBS). Kent's BSIP was well received and subsequently allocated funding totalling £35.1m, £18.9m of which has been received to date for the delivery of an agreed BSIP initiative programme for 2023/24.

In January 2024, Government set out new BSIP guidance for all Local Transport Authorities (LTAs). The guidance requires LTAs to submit an updated 2024 BSIP to the DfT by 12th June 2024. The updated BSIP must update on change and progress since the 2021 BSIP and set out a high-level future initiative programme for 2025-29, deliverable should further external funding be made available by Government through the NBS process.

Recommendation: The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport is asked to APPROVE a BSIP initiative table for the period 2025-2029 for inclusion within Kent's 2024 BSIP submission. The table details proposed initiatives across a range of focus areas (e.g. network, fares and ticketing, infrastructure) which could be delivered should additional external funding be awarded to KCC through the Government's National Bus Strategy process as shown at Appendix A.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As reported previously to this committee, In March 2021 the Government published its National Bus Strategy (NBS) for England, setting out a vision for how bus services and infrastructure could be developed across the country to align with what was termed as the London standard. £3bn of funding was made available to support the strategy, although this figure was subsequently reduced to £1.2bn, due to alternative use of funds for support linked to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.2 In response to the NBS, all Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) were required to submit a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), setting out how the vision of the NBS could be delivered locally, but in the context of the existing challenges facing the bus industry.

- 1.3 In October 2021, KCC worked in conjunction with the county's bus operators to submit its BSIP to Government.
- 1.4 In April 2022 KCC learnt that its BSIP had been well received by Government and that it had been allocated £35.1m of funding to deliver some of the interventions identified within the plan. The first tranche of this funding totalling £18.9m was received in March 2023 and has been utilised to roll out an initiative programme across the 23/24 financial year - See [Decision - 23/00027 - BSIP Tranche One](#). The second tranche of funding, totalling £16.2m for the delivery of initiatives in 24/25 is expected to be received in June 2024 following a Key Decision to accept - [Decision - 23/00104 - BSIP Tranche Two](#).
- 1.5 In January 2024 Government set out new BSIP guidance for all Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) requiring the submission of a revised 2024 BSIP by 12th June 2024.
- 1.6 A 2024 BSIP must be submitted in order to secure the release of Tranche 2 BSIP funding and to ensure that wider funding for buses is not jeopardised.

2. 2024 BSIP Requirement & Kent's Position

- 2.1 A short timescale has been set for the submission of a revised BSIP, requiring the submission of a full document by 12th June 2024.
- 2.2 Government guidance has noted that the 2024 BSIP must consist of three main elements:
 - a) Updating the baseline to 2023/24: updating the 2021 BSIP's taking account of the current situation to reflect all developments since 2021, including evolution of the local bus market post-pandemic and its issues and opportunities and highlighting achievements made since 2021 through BSIP funding received to date.
 - b) Setting out the delivery programme for financial year 2024/25: should BSIP Tranche 2 funding for 24/25 be formally received.
 - c) A plan for 2025 and beyond, refreshing the plan's ambition and setting out a pipeline of proposals for the four years 2025/26 – 2028/29, ready for delivery should external funding be made available from Government through the National Bus Strategy process.
- 2.2 Elements "a" and "b" involve factual updates only, i.e. covering factual information and initiatives already agreed and approved through previous BSIP related Council decisions. As per part "ii" of the proposed Cabinet Member Decision, It is proposed that Kent's Enhanced Partnership Board (EPB) will review and agree this content ahead of submission. Kent's EPB is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport and is attended by the Director of Highways and Transport, the Head of Public Transport and KCC's Traffic Manager. Five operator representatives are also present and all of these attendees have voting rights.

- 2.3 To meet element “c”, it is proposed to submit the 2025-29 initiative table included as Appendix C as part of Kent’s 2024 BSIP submission, as per part “i” of the proposed Cabinet Member Decision.
- 2.4 While timescales set by Government have not allowed for full consultation, KCC has used its existing Enhanced Partnership meeting structure to engage with District Councils and operators on the proposed 2025-29 initiative table. Feedback has been incorporated where possible.
- 2.5 It is very important to note that at this time Government has allocated no further funding for BSIPs for the 2025-29 period. As such, the initiative table provides a high-level summary of initiatives which could be delivered in the event that future funding is made available by Government through the National Bus Strategy process. No initiatives will be deliverable without this additional funding.
- 2.6 Kent’s initiative table has been kept deliberately at a high and strategic level. Should funding be forthcoming to deliver any initiatives within the programme, then the initiatives would be developed to meet local circumstances and to provide more accurate costings.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 All initiatives proposed within Kent’s BSIP initiative programme for 2025-29 are subject to external funding being made available by Government through the NBS process. The submission of the initiative table does not commit KCC to direct financial commitment in the absence of this funding. Should a funding offer be forthcoming in response to this submission, then its acceptance (including related grant terms and conditions) and the initiative programme proposed for progression would be subject to a further Key Decision process. This has been the case for BSIP Tranche 1 and Tranche 2.
- 3.2 Government have advised that the agreement and submission of a 2024 BSIP will secure the release of BSIP tranche 2 funding for 24/25
- 3.3 As noted in previous papers, the acceptance of 24/25 BSIP and BSIP+ will demand that KCC does not reduce its budgets for bus for the 24/25 financial year.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 There are no immediate legal implications linked to the 2024 BSIP. However, it is anticipated that should there be a formal funding offer resulting from this submission that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and Grant Determination Letter would be provided by Government for acceptance.

5. Equality implications

- 5.1 An initial EQIA for Kent’s BSIP has been produced and updated as the project has progressed.

- 5.2 Should any initiative submitted as part of Kent's 2024 BSIP subsequently receive Government funding, it would be subject to EQIA.

6. Other corporate implications

- 6.1 Communication and consultation may be required; however this would only be in the event of the award of funding and subsequent delivery of initiatives.

7. Governance

- 7.1 Following the decision being taken by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport Kent's Enhanced Partnership Board will be asked to sign off for the wider content of Kent's 2024 BSIP, which updates the baseline position up to 23/24 and details the delivery programme.

8. Recommendation

Recommendation: The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport is asked to APPROVE a BSIP initiative table for the period 2025-2029 for inclusion within Kent's 2024 BSIP submission. The table details proposed initiatives across a range of focus areas (e.g. network, fares and ticketing, infrastructure) which could be delivered should additional external funding be awarded to KCC through the Government's National Bus Strategy process as shown at Appendix A.

9. Appendices

Appendix A – Proposed Record of Decision
Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment
Appendix C – BSIP Initiatives

10. Contact Details

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