

Agenda Item 6
Reference Number:
PSEG/09/22

Report title: Bus Service Improvement Plan: sixth month update	
Report to: Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Helen Morris, Head of Integrated Public Transport Unit (IPTU)	
Date: 24 March 2022	For: Discussion
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County Divisions affected: All	

Introduction

1. [Bus Back Better](#), the Government's new national bus strategy was published in March 2021. It required local transport authorities to meet three commitments:
 - To make a statement of intent on either franchising or Enhanced Partnerships by June 2021
 - To publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan by the end of October 2021
 - To put an Enhanced Partnership in place (if that is the chosen route) by the end of March 2022.
2. ECC has met the first two requirements. The third is due to be discussed at Cabinet on 15 March. The paper is [here](#).
3. ECC is also required to publish a six-month update on the BSIP targets by the end of April 2022.

Action required

4. The Committee is asked to consider the contents of the paper.

Everyone's Essex

5. Buses contribute to all four priorities in Everyone's Essex:
 - **the economy:** buses get people to work and training; to the shops and leisure facilities; and support local jobs – all without contributing to the growth limiting impacts of congestion;
 - **the environment:** buses help improve air quality by reducing emissions from traffic. Poor air quality is linked to a significant number of adverse health impacts.
 - **children and families:** buses get children to nursery, school and college; they get parents to work; support family days out; and link generations together.
 - **promoting health, care and wellbeing for all ages:** buses support younger and older people particularly to get out and about; to meet friends; have company and care; access health appointments; and be independent.

Background

6. Pre-Covid there were over 40 million journeys on the bus network in Essex every year. At its lowest that dropped to 12 million during the first lockdown. Buses bring a huge range of benefits to individuals and communities. They also have a key immediate role in mitigating air quality and climate change emissions.
7. Measures to return the bus network to previous levels of patronage and then grow it will benefit everyone. Essex County Council published their [Bus Service Improvement Plan](#) in October. Enhanced Partnerships (background [here](#)) are a way for local authorities to work with operators and wider partners to improve bus services. They are expected to be the main mechanism to enable the delivery of Bus Service Improvement Plans.
8. ECC set three targets as part of its BSIP and committed to the development of two more. This is attached at annex A.

Consideration

9. The six-monthly report on the BSIP will give an update on the numbers for passengers and reliability. The passenger satisfaction measure will not have been updated for this report because of Covid.
10. The six-monthly report will also give an update on the development of measures to test accessibility and modal shift.
11. ECC will also be giving an update on the overall context of the bus network and progress against some of the workstreams identified in section 8 of the BSIP. A full update is due by the end of October 2022 as part of the annual refresh of the BSIP itself.

Next Steps

12. Publication of the sixth monthly report due by the end of April 2022.

List of Appendices

Appendix A – targets section from the BSIP.

Targets section from BSIP:

Target One:

- For reliability to meet the target of 95% of services operating within the statutory window.
 - Our assessment is that our current performance is at 94% (2020-21) but this was during the significantly lower traffic levels of COVID-19. Pre-COVID-19 the baseline level was 92% (2018-20) and 88% (2016-17). This is the range we would expect it to return to initially without intervention.
242. Post lockdown car traffic levels have increased significantly in proportion to the overall number of journeys being made. We expect congestion levels to initially be higher, as increasing numbers of people return to work. Reaching the statutory target would mean a 3% increase on pre-COVID-19 levels of performance. This will need to be achieved in advance of major opportunities to improve things like bus priority. There will be a lag in delivering improvements as we identify pinch points through our twelve District level network reviews and understand how congestion can be addressed.
243. People's perception of reliability is influenced by issues such as roadworks and accidents or breakdowns on the network, that cause significant and frequent delays.
244. We will measure progress towards this reliability target every six months. We do not currently have reliability data measures for each of our large urban areas. We are working with BODS to develop these measures, which will be included in future BSIPs.

Target Two:

- For passenger numbers to see a return to pre-COVID-19 levels of patronage of 40.7 million journeys.
245. Our assessment is that we are currently at 12.6 million journeys for 2020-21. On some services, particularly in rural areas, patronage is as low as 80% less than pre-COVID-19 levels.
246. Patronage in rural areas has been hit significantly harder by the pandemic than urban services; concessionary travel more than fare paying; and travel in office-based economies harder than for factory or manufacturing based economies. For many, concerns about the risk of shared travel will persist and influence their travel choices. We are expecting the return to pre-COVID-19 patronage levels to be challenging, particularly as working patterns change. The revolution in homeworking will also have a profound impact on the frequency with which journeys to work are made.

Target Three:

- For customer satisfaction to maintain an 86% (2019) overall journey satisfaction rating over what we expect to be a volatile time for the network.
- Our current satisfaction rating should be re-assessed in November 2021 following the cancellation of surveys last year due to COVID-19.

247. We use the annual Transport Focus survey to assess customer satisfaction levels, and how we benchmark against our peers. We expect there to be significant network volatility in the coming years, particularly as post-COVID-19 travel patterns bed down. We expect rural routes, which in many cases were already commercially marginal, to struggle. Holding a customer satisfaction level at pre-COVID-19 rates is therefore ambitious. We would rather set a realistic challenge than a superficially impressive target that is never achieved.

Future targets

248. As we undertake our network reviews, we will establish the current baseline for the following, within a District, to develop future targets:

- Accessibility figure based on % of population with access to bus services/times of day/days of week.

249. For many of our residents, the issue is that they do not have access to any bus service. Simply improving existing provision won't address this. We need to understand how our areas score in terms of accessibility and therefore understand where we can focus support. We can then assess how the measures we put in will change accessibility.

- Modal shift % (switch from car to bus)

250. As post-COVID-19 travel patterns bed down we want to understand how people's journey choices are changing and how we support more sustainable travel. For many longer journeys in Essex bus is the only real alternative to car. Understanding the new base position for our urban centres, and the drivers for those choices, will be key to understanding how we shape services to offer an alternative to car.