



Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

6 January 2025

Better Buses in Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Ollie Vickers Cabinet Member for The Economy	
Lead Director:	Dean Sargeant – Director: Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services	
Service Area:	Neighbourhood Enforcement	
Report Author:	Matt Powell – Service Delivery Manager Strategic Transport & Highway Network Management	
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Wards Affected:	All Wards	
Key Decision:	Key Decision	
Forward Plan:	Yes – 22 November 2024	
Report considered by:	SMT – 3 December 2024 Business Briefing – 12 December 2024 Cabinet – 6 January 2025	

1.0 Recommendations for decision/noting:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1.1 Note the continued improvements in bus travel and connectivity across Telford and Wrekin over the last two years that comprises:
 - The provision of seven new bus routes
 - £2 fare cap on Travel Telford services
 - Improved experience through new bus shelters and the Citymapper app
- 1.2 Delegate authority to the Director Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for The Economy to complete all necessary steps to procure the provision of new bus services from July 2025 onwards.

- 1.3 Delegate authority to the Director Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for The Economy to complete all necessary steps to procure the provision of future transport modelling to facilitate development of future transport needs across the borough.
- 1.4 Delegate authority to Director: Policy & Governance to execute any legal documentation required to facilitate and implement the recommendations within this report.

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the council's focus to improve bus travel and connectivity across Telford and Wrekin while seeking approval to procure new bus services to ensure the bus network is fit for the future.
- 2.2 This report also seeks approval to secure necessary professional services to undertake detailed traffic and transport modelling in order to shape the transport network of the future ensuring it meets forecast need.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Telford & Wrekin Council is committed to providing a better-connected and affordable bus network, linking residential, leisure and employment sites in line with the Councils Vision for 2032. Well-connected transport links borough towns with key education, employment and shopping destinations while helping to ease congestion and reduce carbon emissions.
- 2.2 In 2021, The National Bus Strategy for England was published and sought to transform the quality of bus services across the country. In 2024 government committed to providing greater powers locally for bus services; as transport authority, the council has a pivotal role in bringing forward positive change to the bus network. This change is underpinned through the council's commitment to partnership working.
- 2.3 Cabinet at their October 2021 meeting approved the creation of an Enhanced Partnership; at the same meeting, Cabinet received an update on the development of a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) as required by the National Bus Strategy. Telford and Wrekin entered into an Enhanced Partnership on 1st April 2022 that seeks to bring together the council, bus operators and user groups with a focus on increasing patronage, improving services and delivering transformation.
- 2.4 The Bus Service Improvement Plan sets the vision for the bus network in the borough, it is updated in line with the Department for Transport (DfT) guidelines and timescales and is published on the council's website.

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- 2.5 Bus services in the borough are currently operated in two ways, firstly on a commercial basis by private bus operator(s) and secondly under contract to the Council as a supported bus service(s). With the commercial network, the Council works with private operators to drive continuous performance and improvement but has no direct control over the services. However, with the supported network the council has increased control through contractual management processes.
- 2.6 In delivering on the vision and commitments outlined within the Bus Service Improvement Plan, in 2022 the council undertook detailed engagement with residents to understand the challenges and barriers regarding bus travel. At the time, the survey informed the design of new bus routes which largely focused on improving connections from residential areas to employment, health and education, providing connections in rural areas and delivering affordable reliable services.
- 2.7 On analysis of the survey information, the council tendered seven new bus routes with the first launching in December 2022. Starting with the 100 (known locally as the work express) this efficient route connects residential areas including Sutton Hill, Woodside and Brookside with employment sites at Hortonwood, Halesfield and Stafford Park. Operating from 5am to 11pm seven days a week, this service currently averages 12,800 passenger trips a month and continues to grow. The other six services improve connectivity in rural areas linking Newport and Wellington as well as urban services linking Lawley/Lightmoor with the Town Centre and Wellington.
- 2.8 Since launch, these seven services have now completed over 420,000 passenger trips. During the 2023/24 financial year the 99 to 105 services completed 195,000 total journeys compared to 208,000 journeys between April and November 2024. This demonstrates the continued growth while providing much needed connectivity for residents.
- 2.9 As part of developing the new routes and providing affordable transport, in 2022 the council tendered bus routes with a fare structure of £2 for adult and £1 for child per journey. In contrast to governments recent increase of the national fare cap to £3 from January 2025, this council's fare structure continues into 2025 and remains committed to this and similar fare offers going forward.
- 2.10 If the council had not taken action in 2022 and delivered new routes as outlined, large areas of the borough would have seen a loss or reduction of bus routes. This would have resulted in much of the urban area outside of the main borough towns and areas of south Telford along with the entire rural area to the north of the borough would have had no bus services. As a result of route development and investment by the council, the council replaced older failing routes with new routes

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designed with communities and passengers in mind to improve connectivity and reliability of bus services right across the borough.

- 2.11 In November 2024, the council received approximately £3.5m as part of government's £1bn funding announcement during the Autumn Budget. While welcomed, this funding is for 2025/26 and will support new tendered services and infrastructure upgrades such as new bus shelters and expansion of real time passenger information through the Citymapper app. The council continues to champion the need for sustained levels of funding to enable effective planning and delivery of bus services going forward. The council is clear that there can be no return to bus service planning purely on commercial basis.
- 2.12 To inform the delivery of new services from July 2025, the council launched a resident survey in November 2024. This survey builds on that undertaken in 2022 and once the results are collated and analysed, they will underpin the approach to procuring new services.
- 2.13 With the security of funding awarded in the short term, the council is looking wherever possible to maintain or improve the current bus network through these proposals. The council will consider efficient use of vehicles on services but is not anticipating a reduction in service levels overall. Particular consideration will be given to maintaining and improving provision to education establishments to support home to school travel options.
- 2.14 Resident feedback confirms that reliable and up to date information on bus services is very important. This has directly informed the investment into on-street real-time information screens at key locations along with the roll out of the Citymapper app. The Citymapper app allows users to obtain specific real-time information on the journeys wherever they are and has so far seen 2045 users sign up. The council will continue to promote the use of the app with plans being developed to provide more information on how to access it at bus stops.
- 2.15 To add to the existing bus network, the council will shortly operate a Demand Responsive Travel (DRT) in The Gorge Parish area. Initially operating as a pilot, this new travel offer will provide transport links across the Gorge into Madeley and the Town Centre. When planning future routes in other areas of the borough, we will consider DRT solutions to compliment the core bus network. The DRT service will operate the same day ticket fare structure as the other Travel Telford services.
- 2.16 As part of developing and planning transport needs for the future, the council undertakes extensive traffic and transport modelling. This information and assessment is used to understand the impact of development(s) on the transport system while developing mitigation proposals. Typically, such mitigation can

include physical improvements to existing infrastructure and/or provision of new transport links such as bus routes.

- 2.17 Travel patterns have changed significantly over the last 10 years and to ensure the transport network across the borough is fit for the future, the council needs to refresh and develop the existing transport model to ensure all travel modes, specifically bus, is captured correctly. Such work will support transport investment needs for the future.

4.0 Summary of main proposals

- 4.1 The council has developed and delivered seven new bus routes across the borough. These new routes have completed over 400,000 passenger trips since launch in December 2022 with fares capped at £2 for an adult. The existing services are due to expire in July 2025 and the council needs to procure new services in order to maintain connectivity while seeking opportunity to enhance the existing bus network where possible.
- 4.2 Provision of the new services have been underpinned by a resident survey that was undertaken in November 2024.
- 4.3 To inform the transport needs of the future the council needs to refresh and develop the existing transport model. In refreshing the existing transport model, it will ensure that all travel modes, specifically bus, are captured correctly. Having a multi-modal transport model will enable the council to have the evidence base to secure investment to deliver connectivity improvements.

5.0 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The council is committed to delivering affordable reliable public transport for residents and businesses.
- 5.2 The Bus Services Act 2017 currently bans the council from establishing its own bus company; the council welcomes governments commitment for local authorities to have more control over buses in the future and continues to monitor this with interest.
- 5.3 The council could choose not to tender new bus services beyond July 2025, but this would result in the market only providing routes that are commercially viable. Not only would this reduce connectivity and productivity it would be preclude the provision of much needed services that do not provide a commercial return and leave a significant portion of the Borough without bus services (as noted within the report).

6.0 Key Risks

- 6.1 There is a risk that the new tenders could be more expensive than the budget available. Should this occur, the council will explore options to maximise service

provision within the budget available while seeking opportunity to secure external funding where possible.

- 6.2 There is currently limited bus operators operating in the area; as part of the procurement process the council will ensure that a partner is secured to ensure high quality services are provided with a commitment to continuous improvement.
- 6.3 Not having an accurate multi-modal transport model can restrict the ability to plan for the future transport needs and secure necessary funding. Refreshing and developing a multi-modal transport model will ensure the transport needs for the future are identified with the council having the evidence base to secure necessary investment for delivery.

7.0 Council Priorities

- 7.1 Procurement of new bus services and multi-nodal transport modelling supports the following priorities:
- Every child, young person, and adult lives well in their community.
 - All neighbourhoods are a great place to live; and
 - Our natural environment is protected – we take a leading role in addressing the climate emergency.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 Bus services in 2024/25 have been funded through a mixture of Government grant, developer contributions (Section 106) and existing budgets.
- 8.2 £1.54m revenue funding has been allocated in 2025/26 which will facilitate the provision of new tendered services. The council awaits details regarding future year financial allocations.
- 8.3 The tenders for the provision of new bus services from July 2025 onwards will seek to secure an initial two-year period with potential extensions up to a further five years. This initial period will be funded by Government Grant (as referred to in 8.2), developer contributions and existing budgets. Costs and funding opportunities for potential extensions will need to be considered as appropriate, and further financial implications considered as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 8.4 Transport modelling services will be procured with a five-year contract length. These services will be provided on a 'Task Order' basis, meaning that individual tasks will be priced as required and there is no fixed requirement to spend a specific amount over the life of the contract. These services will again be funded by a mixture of Government Grant (as referred to in 8.2), developer contributions and existing budgets.

9.0 Legal and HR Implications

- 9.1 The Bus Services Act 2017 currently prevents local authorities from establishing their own bus companies. The proposed Bus Bill will enable Mayoral and Combined Authority areas to operate a franchise model, but does not, presently, extend this ability to unitary authorities.
- 9.2 The council will procure new bus services and transport modelling professional services in accordance with the contract procedure rules and applicable procurement legislation.
- 9.3 There are no HR implications arising from this report or the recommendations.

10.0 Ward Implications

- 10.1 This report impacts on all wards of the borough.

11.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

- 11.1 Effective and efficient transport network provides the ability for independent travel. Bus travel reduces social isolation and connects communities from rural and urban residential areas with key education and employment destinations, as well as links to the Princess Royal Hospital.
- 11.2 Since 2022 the council operated bus routes have supported over 350,000 passenger trips; procurement of new routes will continue to support connectivity across the borough.
- 11.3 Having an accurate multi-modal transport model will enable the council to have an accurate evidence base that can be used to secure external investment particularly from development(s).

12.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 12.1 Buses improve connectivity and access for all, and maintaining good coverage across the borough supports this. Infrastructure such as bus stops and service information also support accessibility.
- 12.2 The use of a multi-modal transport model will help the Council understand the effects of proposed changes to the network and quantify impacts for all users of the network across the Borough.

13.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

- 13.1 Transport biggest carbon contributor in the borough. Per individual passenger, the average car emits 54% more tonnes of carbon dioxide when compared to the average bus. An effective and efficient bus network will support the councils plan to become carbon neutral by 2030.
- 13.2 To support the development of the new routes over the last two years, the council has installed 100 new bus shelters across the borough. These bus shelters are

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made from recycled plastic and in most cases use solar or wind to power lights and customer information screens. Use of this equipment saw Wellington bus station as the UK's first off grid bus station installed during 2022 which has received recognition nationally. The council will continue to install recycled shelters as part of the continued investment into improving bus travel across the borough.

- 13.3 We will explore use of EV buses when appropriate external funding, market and technology is available and affordable; in the meantime, we continue to specify the latest emission standard vehicles on our tenders to minimise the environmental impact of their operations.

14.0 Background Papers

Bus Service Improvement Plan – [Bus Service Improvement Plan \(BSIP\) - Telford & Wrekin Council](#)

15.0 Appendices

None

16.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Legal	27/11/2024	28/11/2024	RP
Finance	27/11/2024	28/11/2024	PT
Director	27/11/2024	28/11/2024	DRS