



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Enhanced Bus Partnership Plan

DRAFT

Final Draft for Cabinet Approval – March 2022

www.westnorthants.gov.uk

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1.0	21/12/21	Draft for operator consultation
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3.1	18/03/22	Minor changes
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NB: Draft versions 0.1 - final published versions 1.0

Consultees

Internal	External
Cabinet	Bus operators
	Wider Stakeholders

Distribution List

Internal	External

Links to other documents

Document	Link
Bus Service Improvement Plan	Bus timetables, passes and improvements West Northamptonshire Council (westnorthants.gov.uk)
Enhanced Partnership Scheme	Bus timetables, passes and improvements West Northamptonshire Council (westnorthants.gov.uk)

Additional Comments to note

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Part 1 – EP Plan

The West Northamptonshire Council Enhanced Partnership Plan for buses has been prepared in accordance with Section 138H of the Transport Act 2000 and is Made in accordance with Section 138G by West Northamptonshire Council

Executive Summary

West Northamptonshire Council is a new Unitary Authority. Alongside other modes, the Council sees bus as an important travel option for local people, the relative importance of bus will be considered further when the Council develops its own Local Transport Plan. Bus, alongside rail, walking and cycling has a role to play in providing people with an alternative option to the car, and is a more inclusive mode of transport, accessible to most people regardless of whether they can drive, have mobility limitations or age.

This Enhanced Partnership Plan has been developed for West Northamptonshire Council to drive bus improvements for passengers over the three years from 30 April 2022 to 31 March 2025. It fulfils the statutory requirements set out by the Bus Services Act 2017 of an Enhanced Partnership Plan (EPP) for West Northamptonshire. In doing so, it covers the following legally required aspects:

- specifies the area and the period to which the plan relates,
- sets out an analysis of the local services provided in that area,
- sets out policies relating to local services in that area,
- sets out objectives as regards the quality and effectiveness of local services provided in that area by reference to that period,
- describes how the related enhanced partnership scheme or schemes is or are intended to assist in implementing those policies and achieving those objectives,
- describes the intended effect of the related enhanced partnership scheme or schemes on areas neighbouring the area to which the plan relates, and
- how the plan is to be reviewed and, including how it is reviewed and the specific dates by which reviews are to be completed.

This EPP builds on the Bus Service Improvement Plan agreed in October 2021, and puts in place binding commitments on the Council and partner organisations to provide the necessary enhancements to make bus attractive and easier to use and contribute to delivery of our vision for buses, which is:

Our vision for buses

The bus network will meet community need, it will be delivered reliably and efficiently, and the bus offer is understood by the wider community not simply bus users, finally bus use is affordable and easy to use by all

Alongside this EPP is a single Enhanced Partnership Scheme which sets out in greater detail the actions to be taken to deliver this EPP over the next 3 years.

In summary this EPP proposes the interventions set out in the Table of Actions, over.

Table of Actions

BSIP Objectives	EP Approach
1. Bus priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Address bottlenecks impacting bus services (quick wins) by utilising real time data where appropriate b) Identify opportunities for bus priority packages, especially at traffic lights c) Mitigate the impact of roadworks d) Deliver faster journey times and reliability improvements
2. Modern buses and decarbonisation and making passengers feel safer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Lock in current bus standards b) Develop a plan to raise bus standards during this EPP timescale c) Undertake a review of bus stops to ensure their position and layout is safe and reasonably attractive to users, bringing forward a plan to address the more significant shortcomings.
3. Fares and integrated ticketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Introduce capped fares b) Agree standard fare stages with the operators c) Commence plans for a smart ticket offer to be delivered for the next EPP
4. Service network improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Require all-day services to operate across common core hours (0730 to 1900hrs Monday to Fridays, except Bank Holidays) b) Review the bus network serving visitor attractions and work with operators on opportunities for network improvement.
5. Integrated services and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Develop and implement a three-year marketing plan for local bus services b) Require all operators to produce paper timetables and make these available in adequate quantity through agreed outlets c) Bus service maps are to indicate, with equal prominence all bus services operating in the area shown on the map, regardless of operator, and such information kept up-to-date at least every 6 months. d) Improve access to Real Time information e) All maps and timetables are to include prominent information explaining to passengers how to access Real Time information, using the form set out by the Council.
6. Giving passengers a say	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Working with operators and passenger advocacy groups we will develop a Bus Passenger Charter and require operators to abide by its commitments.

1.0 Overview and Governance

- 1.1 The Government has set out its plan to support Local Transport Authorities to improve bus services through the National Bus Strategy: Bus Back Better.
- 1.2 In response to the publication of the National Bus Strategy in March 2021, West Northamptonshire Council confirmed its intention to use an Enhanced Partnership as the way of securing and facilitating further development and improvement of the bus network.
- 1.3 The Enhanced Partnership builds on the longer term strategy set out in the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which set out the Council's plans over the next 3 to 5 years and longer.
- 1.4 BSIP was formally considered by the Council's Cabinet on 12 October 2021, with a delegated decision taken on 24 October 2021 and aims to deliver simple and more cost effective fares, cheaper fares for young people, an integrated bus network, one set of integrated information making it easier for passengers to plan and use the network, reliable journey times with better routing and the continued improvement of bus infrastructure.
- 1.5 As required and set out in section 138F of the Transport Act 2000, notification of intent to introduce an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme was published by the Council at the end of June 2021 following approval at the Council's Cabinet meeting on 8 June 2021.
- 1.6 Benefits of an Enhanced Partnership include the enhancement of quality standards and access to funding for investment in public transport-related projects and activities which might not otherwise be available.
- 1.7 This Enhanced Partnership Plan has been prepared in accordance with Section 138 of the Transport Act 2000 as amended by section 9 of the Bus Services Act 2017, as well as Guidance published by the Department for Transport. Supporting this Enhanced Partnership Plan is an Enhanced Partnership Scheme which sets out the steps to be taken to deliver the vision set out below and the supporting actions.

Duration

- 1.8 This Enhanced Partnership Plan sets out the high level vision and objectives for bus services in the area over the 3 year period between 30 April 2022 and 31 March 2025, it is based on the BSIP, which itself was the subject of public consultation and was produced in accordance with guidance published by the Department for Transport on BSIP's. The timescale also aligns to the funding support requested from Government.
- 1.9 The Enhanced Partnership Plan should be read alongside the accompanying Enhanced Partnership Scheme which sets out in precise detail how the BSIP will be delivered and commitments made by West Northamptonshire Council, as well as standards to be met by bus operators operating services in the area.

Governance and Reviews

- 1.10 The BSIP is itself subject to an annual Review. This Enhanced Partnership Plan and accompanying Scheme will also be reviewed annually and the results of the Review published within 6 months of the anniversary date on which this Enhanced Partnership Plan came into effect. This approach will ensure that the three documents remain aligned.
- 1.11 The review will be led by a Management Forum comprising the Council and involving local bus operators and passenger representatives as a minimum, it will consider the effectiveness of the

Enhanced Partnership Plan and accompanying Scheme in increasing bus patronage and delivery of the underlying actions to improve bus reliability and drive up passenger satisfaction.

- 1.12 The Management Forum will also review the Plan and Scheme in the light of any new Local Transport Plan for West Northamptonshire, as it moves away from the LTP inherited from the former Northamptonshire County Council. If required this may necessitate triggering the legal processes to vary or revoke this EPP and Scheme, replacing these with newer versions reflecting the new Policy.
- 1.13 The Management Forum, comprising the following group(s), have helped develop this Plan, along with the Wider Stakeholder Group both of whom will be consulted as part of any review:

Management Forum

- West Northamptonshire Council (50% voting rights)
- Bus operators or their nominated representative(s) with services registered in this EPP area. One representative for each operator. (50% total voting rights, split in proportion to mileage of services falling within the EPP/EPs)

Wider Stakeholder Group

- Local Transport Groups (one representative per User Group)
- Business improvement districts (one representative per BID)
- Major employers (one representative per employer, employers to be agreed between the Essential members)
- Neighbouring local transport authorities
- Traffic Commissioner
- Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Parish Councils
- University or FE College
- Transport Focus
- Confederation of Passenger Transport
- Bus Users UK

- 1.14 Bus performance data will be published every 6 months.
- 1.15 The results of the reviews and the performance data will be made available to the public on the Council's website [Bus timetables, passes and improvements | West Northamptonshire Council \(westnorthants.gov.uk\)](https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk)

2.0 Area Covered by this Plan

- 2.1 This Enhanced Partnership Plan covers the whole of the West Northamptonshire Council area. West Northamptonshire is a unitary authority area formed on 1 April 2021 through the merger of the three existing non-metropolitan districts of Daventry, Northampton, and South Northamptonshire, it absorbed the functions of these districts, plus those of the abolished Northamptonshire County Council. Figure 1 below, shows the area covered. The area chosen has been determined by the bus network which largely connects the local community into the nearest town centre and connects towns and villages, with cross-boundary travel into towards the towns in North Northamptonshire, especially Wellingborough), Banbury (Oxfordshire) and Milton Keynes (Buckinghamshire) by bus.
- 2.2 The majority of bus journeys are made within Northampton itself and buses operate on a traditional hub-and-spoke network, although there are some more complex routings particularly to serve the edge-of-town industrial estates and large educational institutions such as the University of Northampton and Northampton College.

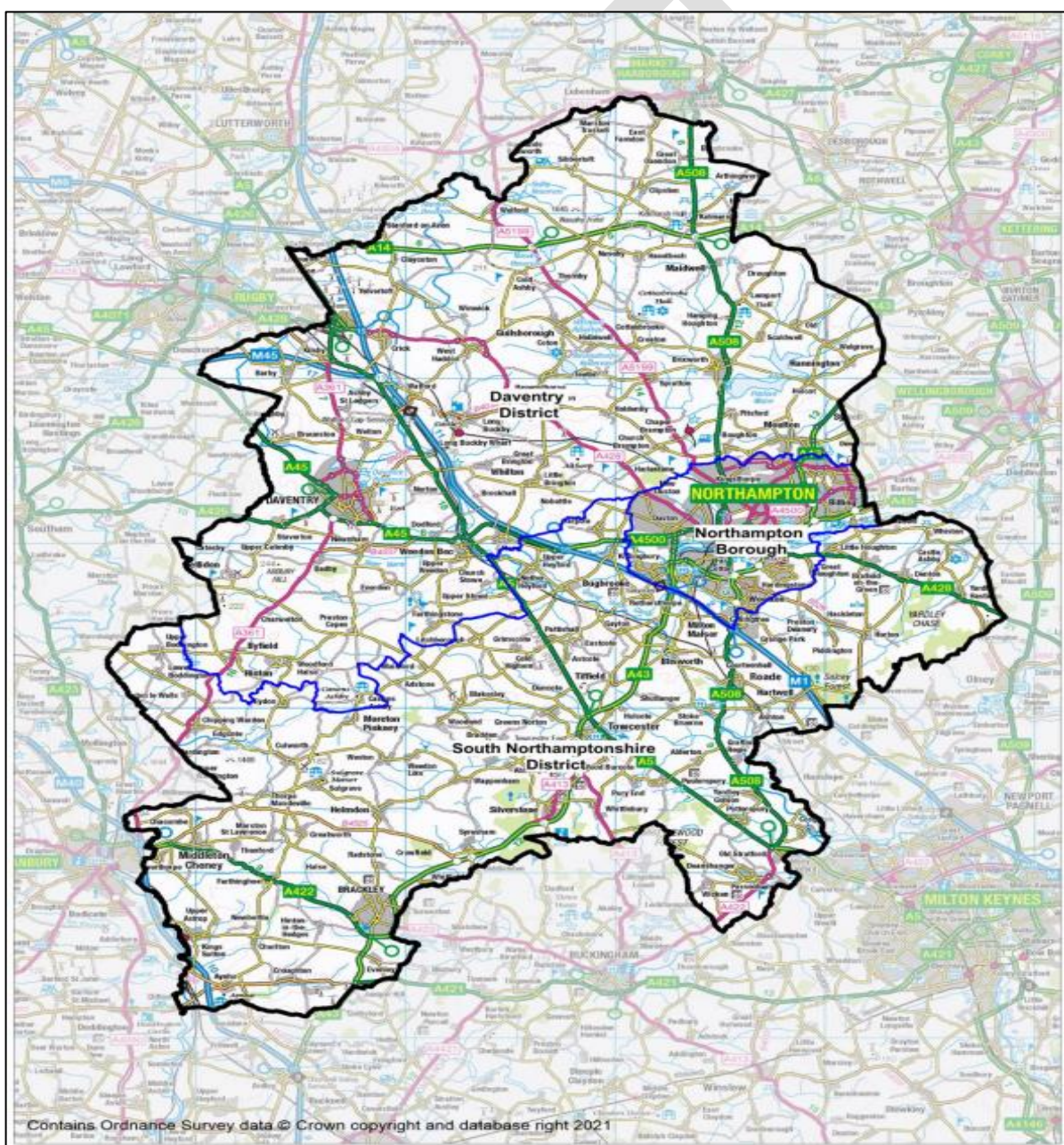


Figure 1 - The West Northamptonshire Council area (within Black line).

3.0 Analysis of Local Bus Services

- 3.1 The bus services across West Northamptonshire carried approximately 10.5m passengers per annum prior to Covid-19, in October 2021 patronage was running at 64% of this level.
- 3.2 In West Northamptonshire 85.2% of households have access to at least a car or van. Of households that own a car, 38.1% have 1 car available, and a further 34.6% have 2 cars available. 14.8% of households have no vehicle according to the 2011 Census.
- 3.3 Travel to work is dominated by private car use. Only 3% of all usual residents aged 16 to 74 travel to work by bus according to the 2011 Census.
- 3.4 This suggests that if the right bus offer can be put in place there is considerable opportunity to achieve modal shift. In doing so we support existing bus users, the bus companies as well as reduce congestion, harmful emissions and road safety risk.

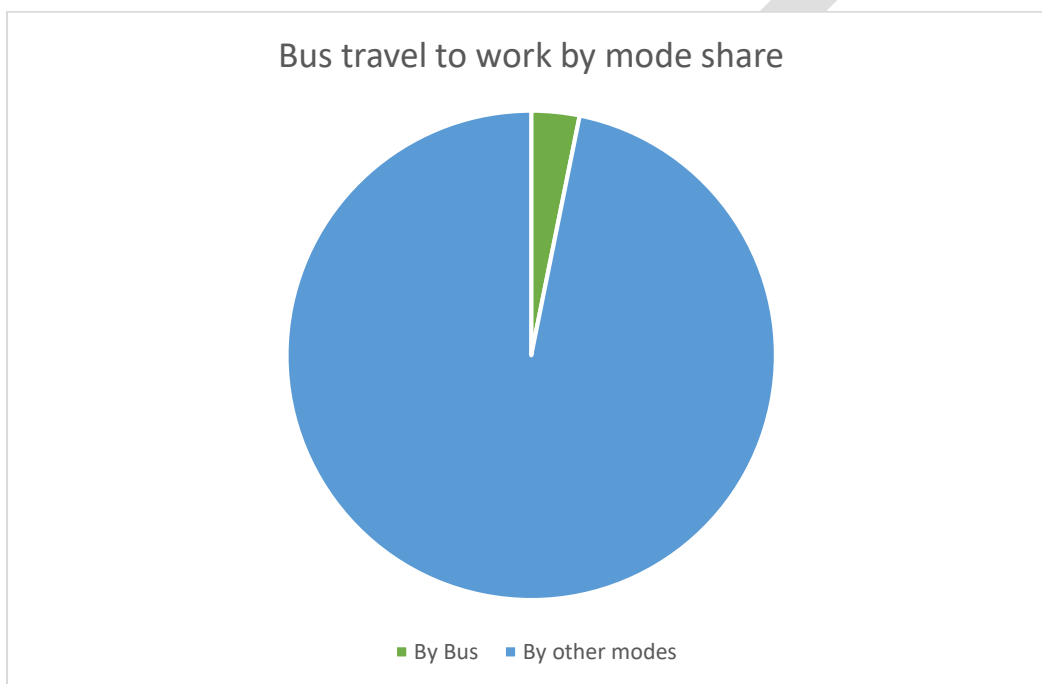


Figure 2 - Travel to work by bus in West Northamptonshire (2011 Census data)

- 3.5 Northampton North Gate bus interchange opened in 2014. Some services use this purpose-built facility, while other services use adjacent on-street stops in The Drapery. Daventry is the only other town in West Northamptonshire with a bus station. There are plans to relocate the facilities in Daventry as part of the Daventry Town Centre Vision 2035. Both bus stations are owned by West Northamptonshire Council.
- 3.6 The dominant operator across West Northamptonshire is Stagecoach Midlands, delivering most services in Northampton, with:
 - Uno providing university staff and students and the general public with services mainly across the north and north-east of Northampton into the town centre and to the University. These services can also be used by the public.
 - Britannia Bus provides services largely in Northampton.
 - A number of other operators typically provide cross-boundary services from further afield, this includes Arriva and Stagecoach East and West.
- 3.7 As well as local bus services there is a vast community transport network operating under section 22 permits. This community transport network serves the rural communities, and those with mobility challenges, for whom a traditional bus network is neither accessible or viable.

- 3.8 Northampton is the only place in West Northamptonshire which sees competition for the same passengers between operators following different routes although differences are small with competition occurring on weekday daytimes. To the north-east there is on street competition between Stagecoach and Unobus and to the north-west one corridor to Kings Heath with competition between Stagecoach and Britannia Bus, however the level of buses provided offer competition but do not constitute over-bussing.
- 3.9 The 2017 Northamptonshire Bus Passenger Survey undertaken by Transport Focus, reported that overall satisfaction with bus travel across Northamptonshire stood at 85%. However, only 68% were satisfied with the punctuality of the bus services.

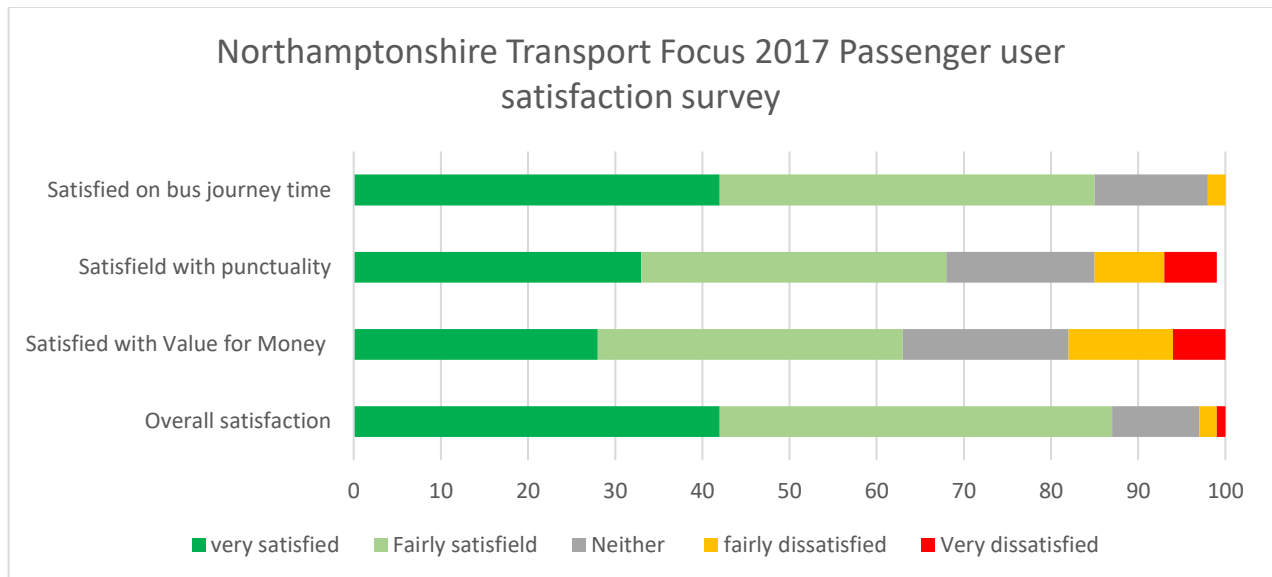


Figure 3 - Transport Focus passenger satisfaction data.

Bus priority

- 3.10 The nature of the road layout in the north eastern and southern expansion areas do not lend themselves well to bus travel resulting in indirect routing and extended journey times. Amongst other factors, bus passengers particularly suffer from the effects of traffic congestion due to the inability of buses to use alternative routes on an ad hoc basis, because of the bus service registration system. Increased congestion results in reduced journey reliability and punctuality.
- 3.11 Analysis of bus corridors, using Realtime data, prior to Covid-19, shows that journey time reliability is an issue on certain corridors. Corridors which require intervention are Harborough Road and Kettering Road. The services that operate reliably to time, run towards the east and west of Northampton. The journey time variability is not fully understood outside of commuter peak congestion, but is considered to be linked to roadworks, localised car parking obstructions, lack of traffic signal coordination and difficult to use bus stop designs. This EPP therefore needs to address the unreliability along the amber and red corridors especially along Harborough Road and Kettering.

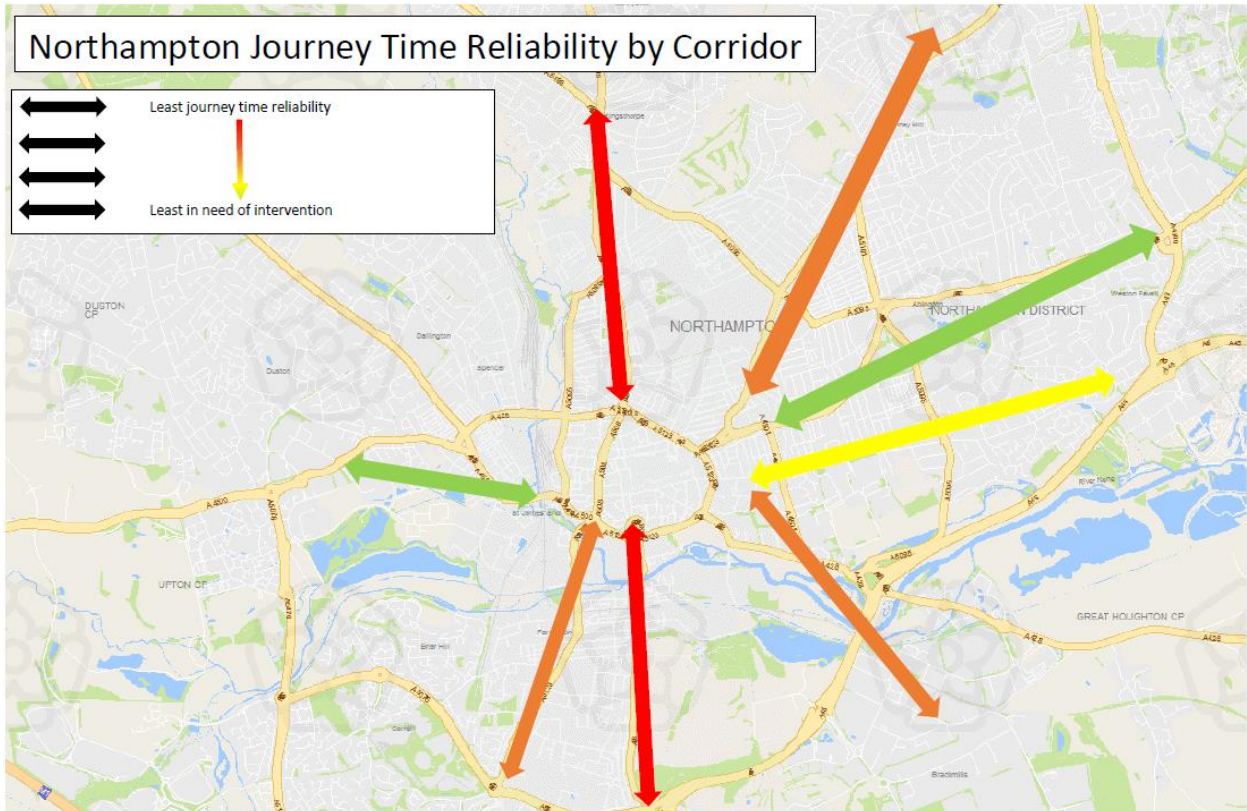


Figure 4 - Bus reliability by corridor

Modern Buses, decarbonisation and user safety

- 3.12 A number of areas have been declared as Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) in Northampton with an additional AQMA in Towcester town centre.
- 3.13 West Northamptonshire Council has a stated commitment towards lessening the impact of climate change and achievement of decarbonisation objectives across West Northamptonshire through developing an Electric Vehicle Strategy as part of its Air Quality Action Plan and encouragement of sustainable transport and increased use of zero-emission vehicles.
- 3.14 Through the Northampton Low Emission Strategy 2017-2025, the Council will encourage and support bus operators to accelerate bus replacement programmes; operate newer, cleaner buses in urban areas; fit NOx and particulate abatement technology on buses; and consider low emission alternatives as part of a low emission pathway to 2025.

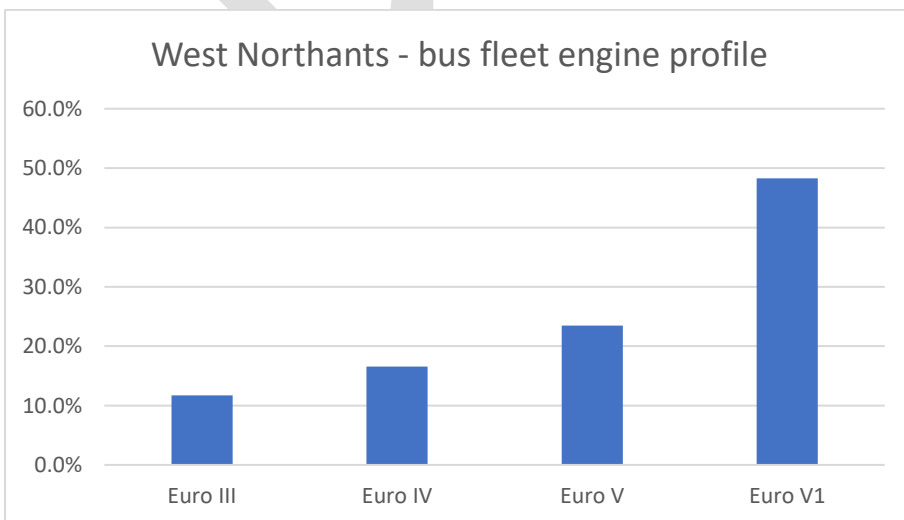


Figure 5 - Bus Fleet Engine Profile Autumn 2021

- 3.15 The 29% of Euro III and IV buses that operate on the network in West Northamptonshire need to be replaced by Euro V or VI (or equivalent) or better electric/hydrogen. This first EPP takes steps to make sure that bus standards are at least maintained, whilst we work on a longer term plan with operators to move towards a carbon neutral solution.
- 3.16 We also want passengers to feel safe at bus stops and on buses, this requires good lighting levels at bus stops, attractive stops and shelters with natural surveillance, and on bus CCTV.

Fares and integrated ticketing

- 3.17 The network is organised around a zonal commercial fare system. Two of the main commercial operators have zonal ticketing which allows unlimited travel over defined periods of time across their networks. In Northampton there is also an existing multi-operator ticket, the Buzz Card allowing daily or weekly travel across all buses in Northampton and villages immediately on its boundary. There is potential to take the Northampton Buzz Card from its current status and turn it in to a smart product, with fare capping enabled.
- 3.18 There is an aspiration to develop the Buzz Card to operate with multi-operators across the whole of West Northamptonshire.
- 3.19 The high level of affordable and free parking availability in town centre off-street car parks including in Northampton also contributes to peak period traffic congestion and associated travel unreliability, together with problems of poor air quality.

Service network improvement

- 3.20 More than 75% of West Northamptonshire's bus patronage is on urban services within Northampton. The remainder are conveyed on the inter-urban and rural services which link the various towns and surrounding villages.
- 3.21 The analysis of the bus services set out in the BSIP concludes that the bus network itself is largely fit for current needs, and currently there are no concerns about over bussing. The area of weakness is the lack of services on evenings and Sunday services on some routes. West Northamptonshire is a growing area and much housing development is underway which will require either the urban bus network to be extended beyond its current boundaries or inter-urban routes to be diverted.
- 3.22 The base network and service level tiers, which the Council wish to see provided are set out in Table 3.5, over. During peak times minor changes to the times quoted to ensure accurate timetabling are acceptable.
- 3.23 The network does not, however, provide services when people need them, especially during the evening and on Sundays. This EPP therefore needs to address gaps in timetable across the wider week and see services returned to pre-covid frequencies.
- 3.24 The network offer for the passenger is not predictable and Urban Tier 1 and 2 services should also operate core hours and frequencies which fully cover the extended peak hours (arriving/departing the town centre between 0730 through to 1900hrs Monday to Friday except bank holidays).
- 3.25 The network also needs to better serve visitor attractions; we will work with operators and attractions to improve access without depending on a car.

Service level	Monday to Saturday daytime	Monday to Saturday evening	Sunday daytime
Urban Tier 1	Typically every 15 minutes or more frequent	Typically every 30 minutes or more frequent	At least every 30 minutes
Urban Tier 2	Typically every 30 minutes or more frequent	Unlikely	Unlikely
Urban Tier 3	Hourly or infrequent or Demand Responsive Transport	None	None
Inter Urban Tier 1	Typically every 30 minutes or more frequent	At least hourly	At least hourly
Inter Urban Tier 2	At least hourly	Unlikely	Unlikely
Rural Tier 3	At least 2-hourly	None	None
Rural Tier 4	Infrequent or Demand Responsive Transport	None	None
Workers service	As justified	As justified	As justified
Academic service	Monday to Friday term time only	None	None

Table 1 - Desired commercial service tiers

Integrated services and Information

- 3.26 West Northamptonshire has a leading Bus Real Time Information system. The real-time information system exists and is working well. Currently, there are 112 real-time displays in the town centre and on key arteries in Northampton. A number of these displays, whilst functional, have been superseded by newer technology.
- 3.27 This Plan proposes expanding the number of Real Time displays especially outside of Northampton and upgrade older displays.
- 3.28 Better information at bus stops is a top 10 bus passenger priority (Transport Focus, Sept 2020) nationwide and a 2017 Transport Focus survey commissioned jointly by Northamptonshire County Council and Stagecoach Midlands gave a below-average rating of 63%. This indicates that, whilst net satisfaction is convincingly positive, there is room for improvement against our statistical neighbours and this EPP seeks to improve passenger understanding on hard to access the real time information.

Giving passengers a say

- 3.29 Through this EPP, the Management Forum and Wider Stakeholder Group, we want passengers and local employers to have the opportunity to influence the delivery of bus services across West Northamptonshire.
- 3.30 We will also work with passenger advocacy groups and operators to agree a Passenger Charter, which once agreed Operators will be obliged to operate in accordance with its commitments.

Summary

- 3.31 The above gaps and result in the Table of Actions, set out at the end of the Executive Summary on page 5 of this document. The Enhanced Partnership Scheme sets out in more detail how these interventions are going to be delivered.

4.0 Policies and Influences relating to Bus Services

- 4.1. This EPP and the supporting scheme will support local policy, informed by an assessment of local opportunities and risks, through acting on the passenger and community areas of concern discussed above. Equally Policies are themselves supportive of bus use and will generate Section 106 funding and put in place measures like Travel Plans to promote and encourage bus use, alongside other more sustainable travel options.

Local Policy

- 4.2. Local Policy is supportive of the Bus, this is necessary to maximise the potential development plans in the area and minimise the detrimental impact of vehicular trips in terms of safety, congestion and pollution.
- 4.3. The West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2011-2029, the Part 1 Local Plan for the area, was adopted in December 2014. In order to alleviate the effects of the significant new development proposed on the transport network, it includes challenging but realistic targets to increase levels of modal shift away from the private car towards other forms of travel including public transport, cycling and walking. The following modal shift targets, based on 2001 census data, are set for 2031:
- A reduction of 5% in single occupancy car journeys to work from the existing built up areas of the Growth and Market towns; and
 - A reduction of 20% in single occupancy car journeys to work from new developments compared to adjoining wards.
- 4.4. These targets are embedded in the Northamptonshire Transportation Plan (March 2012), which forms the current Local Transport Plan for West Northamptonshire. The Northamptonshire Bus Strategy (April 2018), which forms part of the Local Transport Plan suite of documents, identifies that to meet these targets it would be necessary for bus patronage to rise by 50% from the 2012 baseline figure. As bus use actually declined overall between 2012/13 and 2019/20, to achieve these targets will require a 70% increase between the pre-COVID baseline of 2018/19 and 2031/32.

Local influences on bus use

- 4.5. As well as considering the local Policy position it is also important to consider the other local factors which influence whether or not people choose to use the bus.
- 4.6. Supporting more local bus trips is:
- New development in the area, increasing demand for trip making
 - Development of Travel Plans linked to planning permissions granted
 - Parking enforcement
 - Population growth
 - Road congestion making car use less attractive
 - Increases in funding to maintain current and increased services and times of operation
 - Improved information and whole network marketing, to raise awareness of bus travel opportunities.
 - The Council's intention is to maintain Bus Concessionary funding at pre-pandemic levels, although this is subject to the legal exemptions being in place (or equivalent)

- 4.7. Against the opportunities supporting increased bus use, are the following local risks:
- The availability of free car parking in town centres
 - Online retail and other services
 - Cost of bus use if making a journey using more than one bus, or as a group
 - Taxi or car sharing, especially is traveling as a group
 - The winter emergence of further Covid-19 restrictions in response to rising levels of hospitalisation, or new variants of the virus emerging, all of which limit or deter people from travelling communally by bus or train
 - To restore patronage to pre-Covid levels, depends on maintaining the bus network, to do this we estimate that it will take 3 years to restore patronage to pre-pandemic levels. This will require funding support across this period to offset lost fare-box revenue
 - We consider that the service frequency offered across the network does not meet current largely rural community needs, especially in the evening and on a Sunday
 - Growth in car use creates added congestion causing delay and bus timetable unreliability
 - Roadworks are a known cause of bus network delay
 - Perception of safety at and ease of use of bus stops – bus stop upgrades
 - Understanding of the bus network – Information one may, expend real-time offers
 - Bus driver shortages

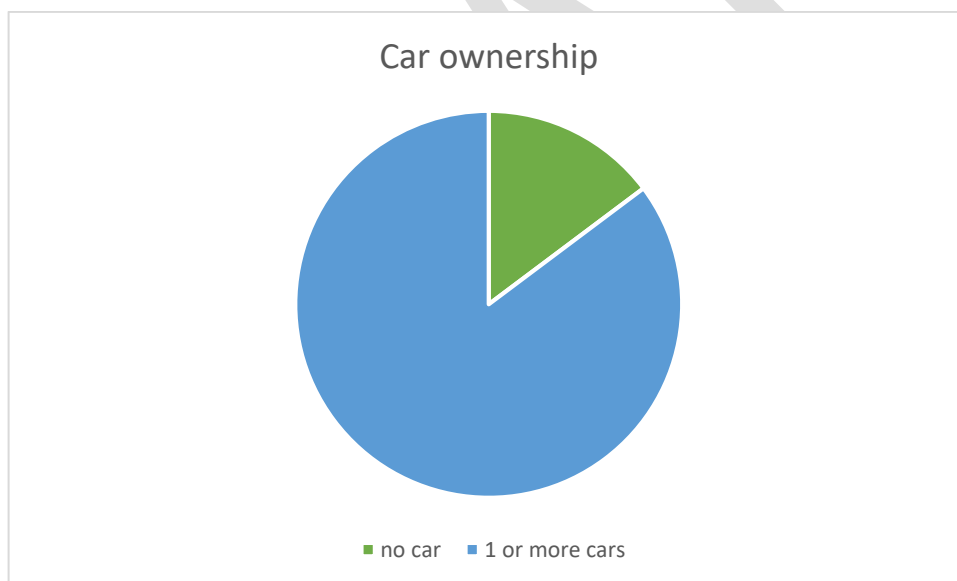


Figure 6 - car ownership levels in West Northamptonshire (2011 Census data).

5.0 Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
National Bus Strategy - Bus Back Better (BBB)	This is the Government's Bus Strategy, published in 2021, setting out how the Government wish to see bus services improved and requiring Local Transport Authorities to either follow the bus Franchising Route or the Enhanced Partnership route to improve bus services. There is always the do-nothing option, but this has been discounted as it would result in the immediate loss of funding to support bus services in the area.
Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)	A document setting out how buses are to be improved in West Northamptonshire over the new 5 years or so. This is prepared in line with Guidance published by the Government and is linked to the Council's declaration to pursue an Enhanced Partnership
Enhanced Partnership	A Partnership approach set out in the Transport Act 2000 as amended by the Bus Services Act 2017, where the Council can impose requirements on bus operators to be able to run services in the area.
Enhanced Partnership Plan (EPP)	This set out a high-level vision and objectives for bus services in the local area and closely follows or replicates relevant sections of the BSIP
Enhanced Partnership Scheme (EPS)	This sets out the precise detail of how the BSIP vision and objectives will be achieved, including any commitments made by the Council or standards to be met by bus operators
Local transport authority	The local authority responsible for transport planning and certain public transport functions within an area
Local Transport Plan	A statutory document prepared by a local transport authority setting out its policies for the encouragement of safe, integrated efficient and economic transport within its area and its proposals for implementation of those policies.
Section 106 developer funding	Funding secured by an obligation placed upon a developer under Section 106 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990.