

Appendix 1

Local Bus Strategy for

Swindon – May 2016

(DRAFT)



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Introduction

The Council's local bus strategy was revised in 2013 in response to budget pressures and the need to have a clear defined strategy to enable the Council to decide which bus services it wished to support and why. The current economic situation since the last revision in 2013, means that it is vitally important that every single piece of Council expenditure represents value for money and supports the achievement of agreed strategic priorities. Therefore, faced with an economic situation that has seen available funding reduce it is necessary to further reassess our approach to securing a local bus network that best responds to the needs of the community and makes a valuable contribution to the future growth of the local economy.

In order to secure this desired outcome, as part of an updated local bus strategy other types of community transport and dial a ride type services will continue to be part of any revision.. This will allow the Council to make best use of the full range of transport services in meeting individual passenger needs. This approach recognises that procuring transport contracts through the conventional bus operators may not always be the most ideal solution.

Section 89 of the 1985 Transport Act gave local authorities responsible for passenger transport the power to procure bus services, which they wish to provide to supplement the commercial bus network. The bus services provided by a local authority are described as those that are considered socially necessary but not commercially viable. Services cannot be provided if they compete against a commercial bus service, as local authorities cannot inhibit commercial bus service operations.

Once the commercial bus services have been identified and registered with the Traffic Commissioner, local authorities are faced with securing those bus services or individual journeys that are not commercial. These are selected on their social necessity.

The vast majority of bus services in Swindon are provided by the local bus operators without the need for any financial support from the Council. Currently this equates to 95% of the local bus network within Swindon Borough.

However, there are certain areas and times when the low level of passenger demand means that a bus service would require financial support in order for

it to operate. In such circumstances, the Council would normally secure these services through a competitive tender process with local bus operators. Where it is more cost effective to make amendments to a commercial service a de minimis arrangement can be put in place instead of tendering. Due to the size of the commercial bus market in the Borough, 'de minimis' agreements with the main commercial operator of a particular bus service is going to be a regular cost effective solution to meeting supported bus service requirements.

The Council remains committed to achieving a fully commercial bus network which is reinforced by its ownership and investment in Thamesdown Transport. However the current financial situation for the next few years has meant the Council is not able to remain committed to revenue supported budgets. This means that the Council will have to consider how best to utilise any remaining funding and alternative means of providing services where there is still a social need for them or they may have to cease altogether. In some examples this will mean bus services may become commercial following investment in them by the Council's revenue funding over the last few years or they will be withdrawn due to a lack of viability.



Background Information

Funding

Bus services can receive funding through -

Council Revenue Funding from general local authority budgets.

Unfortunately the Council cannot maintain revenue supported budgets for bus services in future and so there will be no funding in this area. The Local Bus Strategy therefore needs to be revised to reflect this decision.

Bus Service Operators Grant

Bus operators have historically received funding from Central Government in the form of Bus Service Operators' Grant as a rebate of fuel duty paid on fuel used in the provision of local bus services. The Department for Transport, implementing a decision made by the previous Coalition Government has, from January 2014, devolved an amount equivalent to the Bus Service Operators' Grant to Local Transport Authorities. This is to allow decisions to

be taken locally on how this funding should be spent on bus services that are wholly tendered by the Council.

Swindon Borough Council received funding of £176,205 for the 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 Financial Years and will also receive it for at least a further two years making five years in total. This amount is fixed and will not be adjusted in future years to reflect changes in service patterns or inflation.

Commercial bus services, which in Swindon cover the majority of bus services i.e. those which do not require any funding support or those that operate partly commercial as they require some funding for certain times of the day, will continue to have the Bus Service Operators' Grant paid directly to them by the Department of Transport.

Section 106 funding provided by developers. This is to ensure that any new residential or industrial development is sustainable with public transport. Funding in practice tends to be for five years on the basis that after this period of funding the bus service should be commercially viable. If not, then the service will be withdrawn or the Council may give consideration to providing financial support similar to other Council public transport contracts funded from revenue support.

Dial a Ride Service (Revenue Support)-

The Council also provides annual funding from the revenue support budget to provide a contract (subject to tendering) to provide demand responsive community transport services for those unable to use conventional buses currently consisting of a dial a ride operation. The dial a ride service is designed to be as similar as possible to a conventional bus service, but to reflect the special requirements of its users in its operation and in the facilities provided on the vehicle. The service is designed for driver-only operation, where operators have disability awareness and provide a high standard of customer care, including manual handling assistance.

Other funding

There may be opportunities to secure additional funding from central government such as Better Bus Area Funds. This is why it is important to have a clear strategy in place and bus service improvements/proposals agreed so the Council can take advantage of any new funding initiative should it become available.



The Revised Bus Strategy

The Borough has a high level of commercial bus services (95% currently) and has placed the emphasis on helping operators reach a position where all bus services are commercial by 2020. However, it is appreciated that in meeting the needs of passengers requiring a socially necessary service this will take time to attain.

The revenue support budget funding which currently supports a number of local bus services and which underpinned the Local Bus Strategy revised in 2013 will no longer be available. The removal of revenue support funding is an impact which has meant that the current Local Bus Strategy now needs to be revised further to reflect this impact on funding of local bus services. This proposed revision in 2016 will determine whether local bus services will continue and if they do, how they will be funded following the withdrawal of funding for the revenue support budget. Therefore these revisions for 2016 determine the level of bus service provision from November 2016 onwards.

The limited amount of funding available means that the revised Local Bus Strategy will focus on providing bus services in areas that are rural or have a high level of social need. This will replace the 2013 principles which placed the focus on funding support for evening and Sunday bus service provision. In creating a sustainable bus network for the Borough, a bus charter will be developed setting out the following principles which will be applied, and the main commercial bus operators will be encouraged to support the Bus Charter on a partnership basis.

Principles

- Council will work with the main commercial bus operators to support the bus charter principles.
- The Council will following the withdrawal of revenue support funding for bus services explore alternative solutions for those areas of social need or rural areas.
- The funding priority will no longer be given to evening and Sunday bus services as the focus will now be on rural areas or areas of social need.
- The Bus Network Partnership Board acts as an advisory group to the Cabinet member on bus issues.
- The Bus Network Partnership Board will act as a liaison between commercial bus operators and the Council in the development of bus services, bus priorities and highway improvements to support a commercial bus operation.
- Commercial operators will define the bus network.
- The Council will suggest commercial proposals where the need arises for consideration by commercial operators.
- The Council will work with local organisations including parish/town councils to develop a supporting network of BusLink services using a

number of transport hub centres to enable passengers to connect with commercial bus services. Initially three transport hubs will be identified in North Swindon (Orbital Retail Park), East Swindon (GW Hospital) and South Swindon (Old Town).

- The Council will develop and create a Community Transport Organisation to deliver sustainable transport solutions and BusLink connecting services to the transport hubs.
- A bus improvement plan for the highway will be established every year and will include:
 - A focus on areas of delay
 - Provision of improved passenger facilities at bus stops and interchanges
 - Working with operators and planners to secure sustainable public transport provision to new developments through consideration in the transport assessment required as part of the planning process, of the location and design of new developments
 - To agree a Punctuality Partnership with bus operators which will enable the creation of conditions for punctual and reliable operation, including consideration where appropriate and affordable of bus priority and traffic management measures, network management and management of street works and road closures.
 - More bus lanes and bus priority measures
 - Better enforcement of bus priority measures
 - Enable delivery of a modern town centre bus station
 - Improve real time passenger information systems
 - Develop joint bids to central government for funding for bus infrastructure improvements

Managing Expectations

As part of the Bus Charter , the commercial bus network will be expected to provide –

- A frequent daytime service to the town centre, Monday to Saturday from all the main urban areas of Swindon. This will include a service from each main area to the town centre arriving by 8am and another leaving after 5.30pm to allow access to employment, education and training facilities either in the town centre or by changing onto connecting buses to other parts of Swindon. Regular daytime services between 9am and 5pm (half hourly) will allow access to a range of services and facilities in the town centre or by changing onto connecting buses to other parts of Swindon.
- A frequent daytime service to Swindon town centre Monday to Saturday from all the main settlements outside the urban area i.e. Highworth and Wroughton. This will include a service from each main area to the town centre arriving by 8am and another leaving after 5.30pm to allow access to employment, education and training facilities either in the town centre or by changing onto connecting buses to other parts of Swindon. Regular daytime services between 9am and 5pm

(half hourly) will allow access to a range of services and facilities in the town centre or by changing onto connecting buses to other parts of Swindon.

- A frequent daytime service to Swindon town centre Monday to Saturday from nearby towns and cities in adjoining areas.
- The commercial bus network will be supplemented where there is recognised demand by the provision of evening bus services in the urban area at least hourly from 1900 to 2300. This will only be possible following the withdrawal of revenue support funding for local bus services if the bus service is commercially viable. If there is a social need for them this will only be funded from Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), Section 106 where applicable or parish/town councils.

The effectiveness of this approach will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Bus Network Partnership Board.

- The commercial bus network will be supplemented by the provision of Sunday bus services in the urban area between 0800 and 1800 on a half hourly basis. The Borough Council will work with commercial bus operators to create a Sunday bus network which mirrors the Monday to Saturday operation where there is recognised demand even if it is a reduced frequency in comparison. This will only be possible following the withdrawal of revenue support funding for local bus services if the bus service is commercially viable. If there is a social need for them this will only be funded from Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), Section 106 where applicable or parish/town councils.

The effectiveness of this approach will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Bus Network Partnership Board.

- The Council will work and co-ordinate with commercial bus operators and parish/town councils where there is perceived demand to produce cost effective solutions for socially necessary elements of bus services in non-commercial urban areas and rural areas. Where these are justified they will be subject to tender if appropriate and vehicle size will vary to meet the individual needs of each area.

The effectiveness of this approach will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Bus Network Partnership Board.

Where necessary a community link bus service will be provided (branded 'BusLink').

The effectiveness of this approach will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Bus Network Partnership Board.

- The community link bus service (BusLink or Linkabus) will be a vehicle (capacity 4 – 16 seats dependent upon demand) which collects

passengers from previously non - commercial bus routes and delivers them to the nearest regular bus service at a convenient Hub, making use of interavailability of bus tickets where possible. It will provide this service to ensure passengers can travel to work, for their education or hospital depending upon current demand and need.

- Rural bus services will be replaced by a BusLink/Linkabus service initially funded by the Council before transferring the funding responsibility to a town/parish council. Rural bus services will be revised to meet this requirement and the focus will be on maintaining a link with Swindon in order for passengers to travel to work, for their education or visit the hospital.

The effectiveness of this approach will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Bus Network Partnership Board.

- The Council will continue, where cost effective to do so, to use public bus services to carry pupils and students entitled to free or assisted school and college transport.



Dial a ride and community transport will be revised to take account of the revised bus strategy.

- A dial a ride operation will be, where viable, incorporated into the community based busLink services or alternative individual travel packages will be made available such as travel vouchers. This will give individuals more freedom of choice in how they travel.
- Any new residential development will need to provide a contribution towards community transport operation through Section 106 funding.
- The Council will act as a co-ordinator to assist community groups in meeting their transport needs. This will include holding a transport forum of local groups/organisations such as the RVS.



Section 106 developer funding

The Council will continue to request S106 contributions from developers of new residential and commercial developments to support bus services in the early years of the development. The key objective will be to promote and support a bus service that will eventually be commercially viable. This enables the mitigation of some of the adverse effects of new development on the existing network. In current economic circumstances developers are unable to make the general level of contributions that were sustainable in the past while retaining the viability of their development. In order to maintain an adequate level of bus service it may be necessary to place greater priority on bus service contributions than those for other public facilities.

In the past some developments have been provided with “stand alone” services. These are unlikely to become commercially viable, even in the long term, except in the very largest developments. In future, services will be expected to be provided through alterations or extensions to existing services. This will strengthen these services and give the new development the best chance of retaining a commercially operated route when S106 funding expires.

S106 funded bus services should be enhancements to, or developments of, existing commercial routes so that the risk of failure can be mitigated.

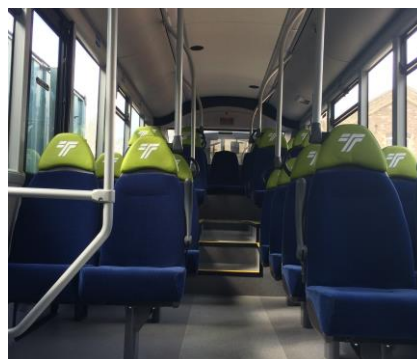
- The whole route, including S106 improvements, can then be promoted through marketing and publicity.
- The potential for operating efficiencies – and lower costs- can be optimised if the S106 routes are not standalone.

The Council may support bus operators after 5 years only if the Council and the bus operator feel it can achieve commerciality at a reasonable point beyond the funding expiry date. The Council will not support the ongoing subsidy of individual s106 provided bus service routes.

S106 route tender specifications should be reasonably flexible to allow operators to put forward compliant bids built around their commercial services.

The effectiveness of this approach will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Bus Network Partnership Board.

The Council will need to consider the number of people who are elderly or have mobility needs that are going to live in new developments and allow for funding to be bid for community transport facilities as well as conventional bus services. Therefore as discussed earlier community transport type services will be included within the bus service provision secured by S106 contributions. This will ensure that all parts of the community have access to transport services.



Linking the Bus Strategy to Corporate Strategy

The bus strategy to continue moving forward must take account of any current or emerging corporate strategy.

The strategy will now link itself to the Vision for Swindon.

By 2030, Swindon will have all of the positive characteristics of a British city with one of the UK's most successful economies; a low-carbon environment with compelling cultural, retail and leisure opportunities and excellent infrastructure. It will be a model of well managed housing growth that supports and improves new and existing communities. Swindon will be physically transformed with existing heritage and landmarks complemented by new ones that people who live, work and visit here would recognise and admire. It will remain, at heart, a place of fairness and opportunity where people can aspire to and achieve prosperity, supported by strong civic and community leadership.

Priority One – Improve infrastructure and housing to support a growing , low-carbon economy.

We have chosen to link the bus strategy to Priority One Improve infrastructure and housing to support a growing, low-carbon economy.

In particular the Strategy will contribute to the following Pledges -

Pledge 7

Build new affordable homes including 200 new council homes and 66 units through the Affordable Housing Development programme at sites including the Hawthorns, the Royal British Legion site in Penhill, Townsend House in Old Town and the former refuge in Park South.

Pledge 8

Complete the redevelopment of Sussex Square.

Pledge 10

As part of the town's regeneration:

Re-develop the former Aspen House site/Granville Street area, to extend on the successful Regent Circus development.

Make Havelock Square an attractive, safe open space to complement local shops.

Pledge 11

Replace the current bus station with a new and modern facility.

Pledge 13

Improve highway linkages to the Eastern Villages, particularly around the White Hart roundabout.

Pledge 14

With Barratt Homes we will build up to 3,500 homes in Wichelstowe including the development of a district centre.

The bus strategy will help achieve this pledge by :

Ensuring that each main area of Swindon has a commercial bus service that allows residents without a car to access a wide range of employment, education and training opportunities across the Borough.

It is important for a successful transport network to have a central interchange in the town to enable passengers to make swift connections between fast and frequent bus services in a safe, secure and friendly environment. The concessionary travel scheme funded bus passenger is a key factor for the town centre economy as we have younger, fitter plus 60 generation with more disposable income than previous generations of a similar age. It is therefore important to encourage this income to be spent in Swindon and support local businesses.

What this will mean:

- This will mean a Monday to Friday bus service from each main area of Swindon to the town centre arriving by 8am and another leaving after 5.30pm to allow access to employment, shopping and leisure facilities either in the town centre or by changing onto connecting buses to other parts of Swindon.
- This will mean that evening and Sunday services only where funding is available will provide a supporting priority to the core commercial network to ensure facilities are in place to enable people to travel to and from work outside traditional work patterns e.g nine to five.

- This will mean that services in rural or social need areas for leisure or recreation purposes or during the middle of the day for shopping or visiting friends or relatives will need to be part of this priority.
- The community link bus service (possibly branded BusLink or Linkabus) would be introduced to meet social needs and demand where a conventional bus service is not a viable solution. As part of this process the Council will work with town/parish councils and/or local groups/organisations to seek a suitable solution.

Priority Two - Offer education opportunities that lead to the right skills and right jobs, in the right places.

Pledge 16

Improve the reputation and image of Swindon to attract inward investment.

We have chosen to link the bus strategy to this priority around providing access to employment, education and training because:

- To maintain Swindon's economic prosperity we must develop and retain existing businesses whilst attracting new ones. We can help by freeing up the local labour market so that business has access to a good pool of local staff which is not hindered by lack of adequate public transport.
- In terms of skills & qualifications, Swindon's performance at GCSE and Levels 2-4 is below average and the gap widens at higher qualification levels. This is reflected in residents' salary levels being lower than commuters into Swindon. We need to ensure that young people are able to access education and training opportunities without facing difficulties due to lack of adequate public transport.
- Swindon's rate of economic inactivity is above average and yet many do want to work. The number of our young people not in work is higher than average. We need to ensure that young people are able to access employment opportunities without facing difficulties due to lack of adequate public transport.

The bus strategy will help achieve this priority by:

- Ensuring that each main area of Swindon has a commercial bus service that allows residents without a car to access a wide range of employment, education and training opportunities across the Borough.

What this will mean:

- This will mean a Monday to Friday bus service from each main area of Swindon to the town centre arriving by 8am and another leaving after 5.30pm to allow access to employment, education and training facilities either in the town centre or by changing onto connecting buses to other parts of Swindon.
- This will mean that evening and Sunday services only where funding is available will provide a supporting priority to the core commercial network to

ensure facilities are in place to enable people to travel to and from work outside traditional work patterns e.g nine to five.

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- The community link bus service (possibly branded BusLink or Linkabus) would be introduced to meet social needs and demand in rural areas where a conventional bus service is not a viable solution and provide a transport link to a transport hub to make a connection with commercial bus services. As part of this process the Council will work with town/parish councils and/or local groups/organisations to seek a suitable solution.

Priority Four - Help people to help themselves while always protecting our most vulnerable children and adults.

Pledge 25

Deliver a borough – wide approach to increase the impact of volunteering, enabling more people to be active citizens in their communities.

Pledge 27

Ensure that more people and their carers are supported to live as independently as possible and reduce the length of time people need to spend in residential care.

We have chosen to link the bus strategy to this priority around providing access to services and facilities to enable people to live independent lives because:

- Spend is skewed to the provision of high cost specialist services rather than preventing future problems arising.
- Demand for all care services continues to rise, with large and unsustainable rises expected in the long term.
- We must identify and take opportunities to reduce spend through early intervention.
- We must promote independence as people want to be in control of their own lives and our way of working needs to support people so they can support themselves.

The bus strategy will help achieve this priority by:

- Ensuring that each main area of Swindon has a bus service (a social safety net service) that allows residents without a car to access the wide range of services and facilities that allow them to live independent lives, in their own homes, while reducing demand on other public services.
- Allowing individuals to access services and facilities in order to support them in improving their own well-being.
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What this will mean:

- This will mean an off peak Monday to Friday bus service from each main area of Swindon to the town centre to allow access to services and facilities in the town centre or by changing onto connecting buses to other parts of Swindon.
- This will mean that evening and Sunday bus services will provide a supporting priority only where funding is available to the core commercial network to ensure facilities are in place to enable people to travel to and from them and maintain their independence.
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- This will mean provision of the BusLink or Linkabus branded community transport bus service in some areas rather than conventional bus services.
- Delivering bus services in the most cost effective way that meet the needs of users so that, for example, by using the community link bus service (possibly branded BusLink or Linkabus) would be introduced to meet social needs and demand in rural areas where a conventional bus service is not a viable solution and provide a transport link to a transport hub to make a connection with commercial bus services. As part of this process the Council will work with town/parish councils and/or local groups/organisations to seek a suitable solution.
 - Provide a community bus service, for example that is tailored to meet the needs of individuals who are unable due to health reasons to access conventional local bus services.

The Bus Network Partnership Board will at its formation be clear on the requirements of the local bus strategy and will work with and review them each year.

Prioritisation

The withdrawal of revenue support funding may mean that further prioritisation is required within these principles.

Priority will be given to locations that would otherwise be isolated from alternative bus services i.e. there would be no alternative service within practical walking distance. This would be primarily the rural areas and rural communities. Walking to another location that has a bus service or completing a journey on foot or bike is more realistic within the urban areas of Swindon. Levels of use may however be less in rural areas so value for money will need to be considered along with alternative forms of transport assistance.

Where demand exceeds available funding levels it may not be possible to address both priority areas equally. priority will be given to maintaining a safety net for the vulnerable to allow them to access goods and services to maintain independence in their own homes above the desire to maintaining access to employment, education and training for those of working age.

The new Bus Network Partnership Board will act as a framework that allows decisions to be made in a forum where the full consequences of decisions are known and annual reviews can be undertaken on a regular basis.

Balancing Needs

In times of less conducive economic conditions affecting the public finance, there will be an inevitable tension between demands for service provision and availability of funding. There will also be tension between the requests for services by people in different parts of Swindon and the overall availability of funding. A “balanced” approach will therefore be taken in order to ensure that resources, and therefore service provision, are shared equally across the Borough so that one area does not receive a higher level of service support than another (after taking into account a test of “value for money”).

Application of guidelines

- Subsidy per passenger trip will be calculated for all services (or estimated for new service/contract until actual data is available).
- Services will be ranked according to subsidy per passenger trip.
- Services above the maximum subsidy per passenger guideline will be reviewed (£4.00 per passenger) and either revised or withdrawn unless there are reasons for continuing support, or alternative lower cost provision can be identified (within the available budget). At all times any decision will be mindful of the economic priorities.
- Services that have the highest subsidy per passenger will be subject to review if funding is under pressure (particularly if a need arises to consider provision of services in other areas).
- If necessary because of budget pressures, the overall network of supported services will be reviewed in order to maintain the widest coverage of provision as possible and alternative service provision will be discussed with parish/town councils.
- Final decisions about which services to reduce or withdraw will be taken by Members, following consultation, balancing the priority of the needs in each category and the impacts of withdrawal against the availability of funding.

