

STN: who we are

The Sustainable Transport Network (STN) is a group of Bristol Green Capital Partnership member organisations that advocate for sustainable transport in Bristol and the wider region. The STN collectively produced the Good Transport Plan for Bristol in 2016, offering a vision of an integrated and sustainable transport network that could be shared by all.

The 850+ Bristol Green Capital Partnership member organisations share a vision of a sustainable Bristol with a high quality of life for all. A key Partnership value is collaboration - bringing organisations and people together to share ideas and achieve change.

1 Main points

Increasing bus use by making buses an attractive travel option is crucial for hitting emissions targets.

We support much of the proposed strategy. But the strategy remains high-level. Its success depends on the detail and the delivery. The strategy needs to proceed to the next level of detail: specify the network, and investigate the practicality of allowing fast bus passage on every metre of each route – not only arterial routes but also orbital routes.

Having gained support for the Bus Strategy, the next step is to articulate to the public a coherent, prioritised and sequenced plan and timeline, and an associated funding strategy.

The fear is that real progress is dependent on the investment in measures to free up arterial routes, which might take years to implement. Bristol's traffic congestion and air pollution problems do not give the luxury of that amount of time. The Bus Deal scheme in Bristol has morphed into a huge programme to improve all arterial routes for bus, bike and foot journeys, each arterial route being a major project in its own right. A programme of projects, even with some projects running in parallel, with each project going through the normal stages, would seem likely to take around 10 years to do all the routes. It has to be challenged whether the process can be speeded up – for instance, using experimental TROs. We would like to see a plan that demonstrates a commitment to speedy implementation.

We have structured our response around the consultation questions. We start by highlighting our response to the consultation questions relating to strategic choices and enablers, as these are key. We then consider the full set of consultation questions.

Strategic choices

Q: Would you be prepared to walk further to a better, more reliable bus service?"

A: We think this is the right approach to sharing out scarce resources, but there should be metrics to ensure that bus services are sufficiently accessible, eg a target maximum walking time from any home to a bus stop. Bristol has a policy of no dwelling being more than 400m of a decent bus route. Alternative provision must be made for those that cannot walk such a distance.

Q: Do you agree with the concept of an interchange-based network?

A: We support the proposed future bus network design - fewer arterial routes, but at higher frequency and cross-city, a small number of frequent orbital services, neighbourhood bus interchanges.

... subject to ...

We do not oppose fewer arterial routes in principle, especially if associated with higher frequency on the main radials. However, feeder routes to suburban bus hubs must fill in the gaps.

We support the concept of neighbourhood hubs, linking arterial routes with orbital services, thus helping to create a co-ordinated network.

... *subject to* ...

- buses need to be frequent enough to make hub connections attractive to users. It will take a long time before road changes are made to free up buses enough to encourage the bus companies to increase bus frequency.
- the hubs and changeover must be easy to navigate.

The hubs should include bus/rail interchanges at all stations where possible. In particular, much improved bus/rail interchange is required at those stations with the highest rail service level: notably Temple Meads, Bristol Parkway and Filton Abbey Wood.

Enablers

Q: Do you agree with the re-allocation of roadsapce in favour of buses to ensure bus services run punctually?

A: Yes. The investment in measures to free up arterial routes is critical.

But it needs to be done in the right way:

- Until the brave political decisions have been made to reallocate road space, everything else is for nothing. We need to see this happen on a key route such as that being planned by Bristol City Council and First Bus for the number 2 route, to show it is possible and show how transformative it is. No half-measures please !
- The brave decisions should include restricting parking/loading space, extending bus-only space, bus-priority traffic signals, pricing of parking provision, traffic restraint mechanisms such as congestion charging and a workplace parking levy.
- To aid the free movement of buses, parking policy has a key role to play to dis-incentivise car use – private traffic being the main obstructive to bus regularity and speed. This means not only a Workplace Parking Levy, but also 'red routes' to enforce strict parking restrictions, and the completion of the Residents Parking Zone programme.
- If roadsapce on the main roads is to be reallocated away from private motor vehicles, it needs to be accompanied by measures to encourage modal switch before vehicles reach those roads. This includes journeys into Bristol from outside Bristol. So the measures should be more than a ring of Park and Ride sites. It should include measures to discourage private motor journeys from using the strategic road network for the journey to the edge of Bristol. If reliance is placed on, for example on a Park and Ride site near Junction 1 of the M32, it will just attract traffic on to the northernmost stretch of the M32.
- We acknowledge the funding gap described in JLTP4, and that reducing the gap can be from extra funding from a number of sources. A workplace parking levy or congestion charge would enable a locally-derived cash flow for public transport operation and investment. Charging cars for using up road-space which would be more efficiently used by other modes of transport would seem particularly appropriate for funding improvement in bus services.
- Re-allocation of roadsapce should allow for protected space for cycles separate from buses, whether on the same route as the buses or on a parallel route. This is in line with the sustainable transport hierarchy, ie walking first, cycling second, public transport third, private motors fourth.

2 Answers to the consultation questions

Vision

Q: To what extent do you agree with our objectives?

A: We agree.

Q: Do you think our target to double passenger numbers is sufficiently ambitious?

A: Different targets should be set for different areas, based on the start point and the potential for change.

Strategic choices

Q: Would you be prepared to walk further to a better, more reliable bus service?

A: Yes. See our full response above.

Q: Do you agree with the concept of an interchange-based network?

A: Yes. See our full response above.

Rural services

Q: Do you agree that rural communities could be better served by connections to transfer hubs?

A: Yes

Q: Do you think that we should explore other transport solutions to serve rural communities rather than conventional bus services?

A: Yes

Enablers

Q: Do you agree with the re-allocation of roadspace in favour of buses to ensure bus services run punctually?

A: Yes. See our full response above.

Q: Do you agree with diverting traffic away from certain public transport corridors?

A: Yes in principle. But in practice there may be few realistic opportunities to do this. The question implies that it is possible to both prioritise road space for buses, and to maintain the amount of roadspace for private vehicles, which is not the case. The solution is not about diverting traffic: it is about using the existing roadspace more efficiently. This is the answer to congestion, and the climate change emergency requires it.

Q: Do you agree with buses having extra 'green time' at traffic signals to help services run punctually?

A: We support bus priority at traffic signals.

Operational aspects

Q: Do you agree with our ticketing principles?

A: Yes. Easy ticketing is key for making bus use attractive.

Q: Are there any other improvements to the provision of bus information that you would like to see?

A: The information at interchanges will be key.

Q: How important are modern vehicles to your passenger experience?

A: Quieter and cleaner buses are very important for meeting emission targets, whereas freeing up buses is key for improving bus usage. We should work towards zero-carbon buses.

Q: Would you be open to using a shared taxi/mini bus to connect to the wider bus network?

A: Community and demand-responsive transport schemes feeding into the other bus routes, and shared taxi schemes, are an essential part of the network, particularly on orbital routes.

Operational framework and prioritising limited funds

Q: How do you think council should spend their budgets for supported bus services?

A: We support the proposed criteria for prioritizing supported bus routes.

Q: Which of the Bus Strategy's themes would you prioritise?

A: See our main points above.

Additional comments:

Operational framework: we think WECA should stick with partnership arrangements for arterial routes until the buses are moving freely, as doing it before buses can move freely carries too much financial risk for the local authority. The Bus Deal should be given a chance to work. Franchising for orbital routes may also carry financial risk, so again WECA should only do it when the arterial routes can subsidise the orbital routes.

Provision for the disabled: There needs to be provision for those who cannot use buses because of physical disability or infirmity. This could include a scheme offering reduced fare travel in taxis and appropriate shared-use vehicles.

Road space reallocation should include:

- protected space for cycles separate from buses as well as other motors, whether on the same route as the buses or on a parallel route, so cyclists are not obliged to use bus lanes to the detriment of cycle safety and attractiveness and bus regularity and punctuality
- ending through-traffic in Bristol city centre by closing Bristol Bridge to private traffic, instigating servicing access loop plans.
- creating a bus lane throughout the M32. It is the main source of car entries into Bristol city centre, and air pollution. Doing this would have a great impact on modal split on this corridor, particularly if accompanied by measures to encourage modal switch before vehicles reach the M32. There should be a separate cycle path.

Funding priority: Investment in bus priority measures should take priority over increases in highway capacity, which itself would increase traffic and thus overall traffic congestion, which slows buses.