



## Enhanced Partnership Board Meeting

### Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2026, 14:00 – 16:00

### Agenda, Actions and Notable Points

**Attendees:**

|                                  |  |                           |
|----------------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| CHAIR: Cllr Steve Forster (HCC)  | Natalie Wigman (HCC)   | Andrew Wilson (HCC)       |
| Caroline Mekky (HCC)             | Martina Olley (HCC)  | Geoff Hobbs (HCC)         |
| Holly Brogden (HCC)              | Doug Claringbold (First Bus)                                   | Ed Wills (Go South Coast) |
| Alex Barrett (Community First)   | Robert Williams (Reading Buses – representing other operators) |                           |
| James O’Neill (Stagecoach South) |  |                           |

**Apologies:**

|                                |                               |                                |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Cllr Kirsty North (HCC)        | Frank Baxter (HCC)            | David Garney (SCC)             |
| Tim Houghton (Community First) | Marc Reddy (Stagecoach South) | Nawal Atiq (National Highways) |

**Agenda:**

1. Welcome & Introductions
2. Review of Actions from the last EP Board meeting (3 February 2026)
3. Round the table updates (operators and CTOs)
4. LABG funding and DfT announcements
  - 4.1. Update on Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG) delivery plan for 2026/27 – 2027/28 including Exec Member Decision Day report (2 March)
  - 4.2. Enhanced Partnership Report & EP Manual publication
  - 4.3. Socially Necessary Local Services (SNLS)
  - 4.4. Network Accessibility Plan (NAP)
5. HCC update
  - 5.1. Devolution & LGR update
  - 5.2. Thursday 7th May 2026 County Council elections
6. EP/BSIP Delivery Progress update on 2025/26 Work Programme delivery under 6 project themes
  - 6.1. Faster (Reliability/ Punctuality)
  - 6.2. More frequent
  - 6.3. More affordable
  - 6.4. Better connected
  - 6.5. Better journey experience – incl BIIPs, new bus shelters, TSP
  - 6.6. Greener - decarbonising bus travel
  - 6.7. Bus It! Fare Play – joint marketing campaign
  - 6.8. 2025 Your Bus Journey survey - headlines
7. Summary of key points discussed at Hampshire EP Forum meeting (20 May 2026)
8. AOB

**Actions**

|          | Action  | Responsibility |
|----------|---|----------------|
| <b>1</b> | HCC to arrange a site visit with Cllr Forster and Ed Wills to see traffic signal bus priority at work on Bluestar 2 corridor  | HCC            |
| <b>2</b> | Ed Wills to share the previous work undertaken on accessibility ratings for bus stops within Go Ahead operating area, which used a league-table approach and was submitted to the DfT | Go South Coast |

**Notable points**

| Notable Points |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>I.</b>      | <p>HCC welcomed attendees to the meeting and noted the introductions of new Board members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cllr Steve Forster</b> was welcomed as the new Executive Member for Highways and Passenger Transport at Hampshire County Council and Chair of the Hampshire EP Board.</li> <li>• <b>Doug Claringbold</b> was welcomed as Managing Director for First South and West of England.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>II.</b>     | <p>Round the table updates were given from bus operators, CT operators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Stagecoach South</b> – Stagecoach reported improving passenger numbers overall, particularly on longer-distance interurban routes, while noting that urban services remain more challenging and with travel demand patterns seeing a shift in the proportion of journeys made at weekends, early mornings and evenings which are busier. Power grid connection work at Aldershot by SSE is continuing and all 22 electric buses will then be deployed into service on the 1 and 20 services once the grid connection work is completed. Positive growth is continuing in the Portsmouth and SE Hampshire area following network refinements, especially around QA Hospital and ferry connections, with further service changes planned for September. Ongoing disruption from roadworks, particularly short-notice utility works, remains a challenge. Improvements to the Stagecoach app have also been delivered, including multi-operator journey planning and expanded ticketing functionality.</li> <li>• <b>Go South Coast</b> – Go South Coast reported a very positive operational position, seeing continued growth in passenger numbers across their Hampshire network, and low driver vacancies. Punctuality remains strong, supported by transparent monthly reporting, and BSIP-supported routes such as Bluestar 1 and 9 are performing well, alongside positive progress on schemes including the planned new Southampton-Hedge End-Botley-Whiteley service. The operator also highlighted progress with electrification, particularly the Activ8 route, but noted ongoing grid capacity constraints in Southampton and Totton limiting wider EV rollout. Continued fleet investment was confirmed, including new diesel vehicles for Lymington, and recent service changes in the New Forest have been successful.</li> <li>• <b>First Bus</b> – First reported strong performance across the South Hampshire and Portsmouth area with good service delivery and passenger numbers. Enhancements are planned for the Fareham–Portsmouth corridor, alongside some reworking of the Gosport network from 7 June. Depot electrification remains a key focus, with further work underway to assess options at Hilsea depot. First also shared learning from free youth travel schemes in Bristol (last year), highlighting increased patronage, manageable levels of antisocial behaviour, and positive longer-term growth impacts.</li> <li>• <b>Reading Buses</b> – Reading Buses reported continued growth on the Flightline service between Basingstoke and Heathrow, with additional capacity being introduced from July 2026. Line 2 is under review ahead of September to improve punctuality. The operator also highlighted concerns around future fare cap reimbursement and will confirm participation in the August young person’s free travel scheme once funding details are confirmed. Further rollout of battery electric buses remains constrained by route length, depot capacity and grid limitations.</li> <li>• <b>Community First (CF)</b> – Community First reported stable to improving performance, with passenger numbers holding steady or increasing. Investment in fleet renewal continues, although driver recruitment remains challenging due to D1 licence restrictions, which are being escalated at a national level by the CTA. The operator highlighted strong performance from the relaunched Route 44 and its extension, alongside continued growth on the KB1 in Winchester, particularly in the early morning commuter market. The Andover DRT scheme is also performing well, has been extended for a further year until March 2028, and will see resourcing tweaks to optimise and boost vehicle availability over the summer.</li> </ul> |
| <b>III.</b>    | <p>LABG funding and DfT announcements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Update on Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG) delivery plan for 2026/27 – 2027/28 including Exec Member Decision Day report (2 March)</b> - The Board noted the confirmed multi-year funding allocation (Capital and Revenue), with £14.87m for 2026/27 and £15.01m for 2027/28. Capital</li> </ul>   |

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|            | <p>investment will focus on bus stop infrastructure, real-time information, EV charging infrastructure, bus priority measures, and community-led transport. Revenue funding will support service enhancements, commercial network support, accessibility planning, marketing initiatives, and development of future scheme pipeline. Programme for 26/27 and 27/28 agreed in <a href="#">2 March Executive Member for Highways &amp; Passenger Transport Decision Day report</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Enhanced Partnership Report &amp; EP Manual publication</b> - DfT guidance published in April confirms that most Enhanced Partnerships have been broadly effective in improving bus services in England, with a focus on passenger-led, collaborative delivery. New minimum standards must be achieved by March 2027, including multi-operator ticketing, data publication, accessibility considerations, and infrastructure maintenance. Hampshire will continue aligning with DfT guidance, ensuring compliance with updated Enhanced Partnership requirements by March 2027, with operators contributing data on performance and patronage when necessary.</li> <li>• <b>Socially Necessary Local Services (SNLS)</b> - The Board noted new statutory requirements under the Bus Services Act 2025 to define and maintain a list of socially necessary services, based on robust evidence of need. Work will progress on defining Socially Necessary Local Services, with HCC officers developing a robust methodology and producing a list by early April 2027. Operators will be asked to support this process through provision of data where required, and further work will define thresholds for “substantial change.” It was suggested that councillor briefings might be beneficial to raise awareness and understanding of this new duty.</li> <li>• <b>Network Accessibility Plan (NAP)</b> - A new duty will require a full network-wide accessibility assessment, covering infrastructure, information and the end-to-end journey experience for disabled passengers. Priority will be given to identifying key barriers and developing a phased improvement programme, recognising the scale of the network and the number of rural stops. Operators will highlight priority issues affecting disabled passengers to inform investment.</li> </ul> |
| <p>IV.</p> | <p>HCC update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>LGR update</b> - The Board received an update on the transition from a two-tier system to a unitary structure, with five new authorities to be in place by April 2028. The EP Board were advised that the transition will introduce complexity in the short term, but aims to deliver longer-term efficiencies, particularly through reduced duplication in back-office functions.</li> <li>• <b>Devolution update</b> - A Hampshire and Solent Combined Authority is also being established to take on strategic responsibilities, including transport planning and public transport planning.</li> <li>• Operators should expect continued engagement through these transitions.</li> <li>• <b>Thursday 7th May 2026 County Council elections</b> - The election resulted in no overall control, with 27 Conservative, 26 Liberal Democrat and 20 Reform councillors, alongside smaller representation from other parties. A new Cabinet has been established, and the Board was advised that a large proportion of County Councillors are new, so operators should refer any governance-related queries they get from councillors to HCC officers. HCC officers will continue briefing and supporting newly elected councillors.</li> </ul>  |
| <p>V.</p>  | <p>HCC provided an update on EP/BSIP Delivery Progress on 2025/26 Work Programme delivery under the following project themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Faster (Reliability/ Punctuality)</b> - Traffic signal priority schemes have been successfully delivered on key corridors, with further rollout on the 1 service in the Farnborough/Aldershot area ongoing and additional bus priority studies in development.</li> <li>• <b>More frequent</b> - A total of 29 service enhancements across 23 routes are being delivered, with several previously supported routes now operating commercially.</li> <li>• <b>More affordable</b> - The £1 evening fare on Bluestar services has been extended to March 2027. The national free travel scheme for young people in August 2026 was also noted.</li> <li>• <b>Better connected</b> - The Andover DRT scheme continues to perform strongly, exceeding 10,000 passenger journeys. Additional funding is supporting community-led transport and introduction of new bus connections serving areas of new housing, including a new hourly Mon-Sat service linking Southampton-Hedge End- Botley- North Whiteley- Whiteley.</li> </ul>  |

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|       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Better journey experience – incl BIIPs, new stops on Eclipse, TSP</b> - <a href="#">Significant investment in bus stop infrastructure</a> continues, alongside improvements in real-time information, travel training schemes, and personal safety initiatives such as the Gosport Travel Safe project.</li> <li>• <b>Greener - decarbonising bus travel</b> - Progress continues on zero-emission buses, with deployments across the Solent and further investment planned in charging infrastructure. However, power supply grid capacity constraints remain a key risk.</li> </ul>   |
| VI.   | <p>The following key headlines were discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Bus It! Fare Play – joint marketing campaign</b> - The Board noted the launch of the “<i>Bus It, Fare Play</i>” campaign, developed jointly with Go South Coast, First Solent and Stagecoach following the success of the 2024 campaign. Jointly funded by HCC and SCC using BSIP funding, the campaign uses themed messaging focused on value, convenience and everyday use of bus travel. Delivery will take place through a multi-channel approach, including social media, posters and radio/digital audio advertising, supported by a <a href="#">central webpage</a> to help passengers find local services. The campaign is aimed at a broad audience, particularly targeting non-users and infrequent users, and will run over an eight-week period.</li> <li>• <b>2025 Your Bus Journey survey – headlines</b> - Customer satisfaction has risen to 90% from 86%, placing Hampshire 9th nationally and reflecting strong year-on-year improvement. A summary of the 2025 Your Bus Journey results is available <a href="#">here</a>, and Board members can request the full Hampshire 2025 dataset by contacting <a href="mailto:hampshire.bus.strategy@hants.gov.uk">hampshire.bus.strategy@hants.gov.uk</a>.</li> </ul> |
| VII.  | <p>Summary of key points discussed at Hampshire EP Forum meeting (20 May):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The EP Forum emphasised the need for a more ambitious, growth-focused network, with particular concern around rural accessibility and unmet demand. Improving multi-operator integration, accessibility across the whole journey, and earlier engagement with new developments were identified as priorities. Reliability issues, particularly for disabled passengers, were highlighted as a key area for improvement.</li> </ul>  |
| VIII. | <p>AOB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board noted progress with plans to introduce a lane rental scheme to better manage and reduce disruption caused by roadworks on strategically important roads, subject to DfT approval.</li> </ul>  |
| IX.   | <p>The next meeting will take on place on Friday 23rd October, 14:00 – 16:00 (via. MS Teams)</p>  |