



Enhanced Partnership Board Meeting

Tuesday 3rd February 2026, 10:00 – 12:00

Agenda, Actions and Notable Points

Attendees:

CHAIR: Cllr Lulu Bowerman (HCC)	Natalie Wigman (HCC)	Andrew Wilson (HCC)
Caroline Mekky (HCC)	Martina Olley (HCC)	Geoff Hobbs (HCC)
Holly Brogden (HCC)	Simon Goff (First Bus)	Tim Houghton (Community First)
Marc Reddy (Stagecoach South)	James O’Neill (Stagecoach South)	Ed Wills (Go South Coast)
Alex Barrett (Community First)	Robert Williams (Reading Buses – representing other operators)	
Nawal Atiq (National Highways)		

Apologies:

Cllr Nick Adams-King (HCC)	Cllr Kirsty North (HCC)	Frank Baxter (HCC)
David Garney (SCC)	Richard Tyldsley (Go South Coast)	

Agenda:

1. Welcome & Introductions
2. Review of Actions from the last EP Board meeting (11 November 2025)
3. Round the table updates (operators and CTOs)
4. EP/BSIP LABG funding and DfT announcements
 - 4.1. Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG) allocation for Hampshire for 2026/27 – 2029/30 (four years) – summary of key points from DfT guidance
 - 4.2. DfT bus passenger statistics for 2024/25
 - 4.3. Proposed key themes and priorities for inclusion in 26/27 work programme
 - 4.4. 2026/27 LABG Exec Member Decision Day report for 2 March
 - 4.5. 2026/27 Local Transport Delivery Plan – submitting by end Mar
 - 4.6. Bus Services Act 2025 – Defining Socially necessary bus services in Hampshire by March 2027
 - 4.7. Bus Services Act 2025 - Bus Network Accessibility Plan
5. HCC update
 - 5.1. Devolution & LGR update
 - 5.2. Thursday 7th May 2026 County Council elections
6. EP/BSIP Progress update on 2025/26 Work Programme delivery under 6 project themes
 - 6.1. Reliability/ Punctuality
 - 6.2. More frequent
 - 6.3. Affordability
 - 6.4. Connectivity
 - 6.5. Better journey experience
 - 6.6. Decarbonising bus travel
7. Summary of key points discussed at Hampshire EP Forum meeting (19 February)
8. AOB

Actions

	Action	Responsibility
1	HCC to arrange a site visit with Cllr Bowerman and Ed Wills to see traffic signal bus priority at work on Bluestar 2 corridor	HCC
2	Bus operators are asked to highlight any specific areas requiring accessibility improvements and report them to hampshire.bus.strategy@hants.gov.uk for consideration within the multi-year investment plan	Bus operators

3	Bus operators to notify HCC of any locations with recurring enforcement issues and highlight sites where drivers frequently find it difficult to pull up to the kerb at particular bus stops or where there is loading/unloading activity on bus lanes, so that HCC can share with Parking Services enforcement team.	Bus operators
4	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
5	HCC to review Stagecoach's comments regarding the fully enclosed BRT shelter design with a single entrance/exit, particularly in relation to personal safety for women and girls, and provide further clarification in due course	HCC

Notable points

Notable Points	
i.	<p>Round the table updates were given from bus operators, CT operators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stagecoach South – reported that passenger growth remains subdued in some areas. Travel by Concessionary Pass holders in Hampshire has seen slower growth than in other local transport authority areas. The first electric double decker bus for use on two routes serving Aldershot has arrived; electric charging points are being installed. Are currently awaiting permit for roadworks and grid connection. Noted the continued issue of slow Distribution Network Operator (DNO) responsiveness, any opportunity for LTAs to influence Government to address this would be valuable. The 21 other electric buses currently in storage in Yorkshire will come down to Hampshire once depot ready. Preparations for 11 electric double deck buses for Service 700 (Chichester-Portsmouth) are progressing. Roadworks are significantly affecting patronage across multiple locations with significant works planned in Basingstoke and Fair Oak in 2026, awaiting further detail on service impact. There is a collective need to better coordinate roadworks; worth exploring BSIP funding for a dedicated role within the Streetworks office (HCC to discuss separately). Patronage growth has been dampened by the £2 flat fare having increased just over a year ago to £3 (since 1 Jan 2025). Welcomed the DfT award of Local Bus Allocation Grant to Hampshire over the next 4 years. Go South Coast – reported encouraging passenger growth across most areas, though a few locations still require targeted marketing and promotion. Driver recruitment is strong, with a healthy volume of applicants, improved gender balance, and more young candidates coming through. Next-stop audio systems have been rolled out, now linked to live train times. Legislative hearing loops are being installed, and Bluetooth-enabled systems are also being trialled to reflect the NHS shift toward Bluetooth hearing aids. Work is underway to ensure on-bus equipment is fully compatible, and this has been raised with the DfT to avoid future retrofitting and ensure the new hearing loops meet the needs of all users. Ed reported a keen interest in improving accessibility further, including infrastructure, vehicle features, and the development of new services to enhance the network's potential. Ed's work with Google is progressing to support accessible journey planning, drawing on experience from Brighton. AW confirmed substantial accessibility funding for the next four years, with HCC asking operators to highlight any specific areas where accessibility improvements are most needed. First Bus – reported growth in concessionary travel in several areas, with good growth in trips by children and young people. Full fare adults form the majority of journeys, though there has been a slight dip in numbers. Core routes are seeing solid performance during normal operating hours and further thought and revisions are needed to optimise service frequencies during evenings and weekends. Roadworks impact is limited, with lost mileage under 1%, and Solent scores among the highest for net promoter ratings. Staffing remains healthy with a strong recruitment pipeline. First Bus thanked partners for joint work with councils and police on reinstating full services after ASB issues on the Eclipse busway with partners making modifications to increase safety and visibility.

	<p>The DfT LABG funding announcements for LTAs in the Portsmouth & Hampshire areas will help to accelerate the rollout of electric buses across the Solent, with discussions ongoing on bringing forward Hilsa depot upgrades. First Solent have 64 EVs in service, all performing well.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Buses –reported trends similar to other operators, with concessionary growth. Robert asked for clarity on future bus-funding allocations and priorities, and highlighted support for capital investment in shelters and bus-priority measures to improve accessibility and efficiency. Robert also sought clarity on revenue-funding priorities, and which routes may be strongest for investment, noting several ideas for new services. HCC noted that an accessibility improvements investment workstream is being developed, which will lead to several bus-stops being enhanced to make them more accessible. A bus station and hub improvement plan is being prepared, with funding allocated to this theme. On revenue, HCC confirmed that prioritisation on timetable improvements is guided by operators’ local knowledge and commercial understanding of growth potential and which timetable enhancements are most likely to become financially sustainable after the initial BSIP investment period ends. Proposals from operators are welcome and will be considered as part of the wider mix. • Community First (CF) – reported strong growth on Connect services in Fareham, Gosport and Havant, with demand remaining higher than in previous years. The rollout of the new booking and routing system continues, going live in Basingstoke next week and Winchester next month. Usage on Route 44 and KB1 remains on an upward trajectory. Are working with Parish Councils and HCC to extend the service from March (utilising BSIP Community Led Transport Grant funding from HCC to help to cover operating costs for a time-limited period whilst passenger demand builds up), which will improve connections with B*1 and B*5. Northern Test Valley DDRT pilot continues to perform well, supported by positive feedback and a good mix of users. MiDAS training uptake remains strong, with good engagement from partner organisations. CF is also in discussions with parishes in the Waterside area to improve access to health and other services, exploring options to better connect rural passengers to the wider bus network, particularly around Fawley and the Waterside, and is keen to engage with operators where funding support may allow further service development.
ii.	<p>EP/BSIP LABG funding and DfT announcements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG) allocation for Hampshire for 2026/27 – 2029/30 (four years) – summary of key points from DfT guidance - Over the four year period 2026/27 to 2029/30, Hampshire will receive an allocation of between ~£14.8m-£15.2m of LABG funding annually, with modest growth in capital funding each year with the amount of revenue funding received staying the same. Overall, HCC is pleased with the outcome, providing stability to develop a robust programme and progress higher-cost schemes such as Fareham Bus Station. The DfT guidance confirms that consolidated grants under the Bus Services Act give LTAs greater control over bus networks, with revenue and capital funding now categorised under the Bus Services Fund and the Integrated Transport Fund respectively. LTAs won’t be able to move change the type of funding between capital and revenue or vice versa. The LABG will be paid quarterly once MoUs and delivery plans are submitted. Capital funding is over a 4-year period from 2026/27 to 2029/30 and the revenue funding allocations cover 3 years to 2028/29. • Proposed key themes and priorities for inclusion in 26/27 work programme – Proposed revenue and capital themes were outlined to the EP Board with positive feedback. Details of the plan to be made publicly available in the Decision Day report published W/C 23rd February. Operators sought clarity on delivering EV infrastructure projects within a single financial year. HCC explained that DfT requires capital to be spent in-year where possible. Where there are longer lead-in times for projects the funding for each financial year would need to be committed by the end of March in that financial year, with 12 months to spend thereafter. Revenue funding needs to be spent within the financial year that it covers. In some exceptional circumstances, some revenue funding could be carried over but should be utilised fully by the early part of the following financial year. Community Transport representatives welcomed the inclusion of hub and spoke pilots and continuation of the Community-Led Transport Grants in the programme and emphasised their role

in supporting wider connectivity. They highlighted financial challenges around EV adoption for minibuses and expressed interest in continued dialogue with HCC and operators. The Board discussed how the electric minibus market is not yet sufficiently developed, but discussions will continue. HCC also confirmed that work is underway to gather passenger insight, including focus groups to understand what would encourage greater bus use. During discussion on the development of new bus lanes and bus gates, Board members raised the question about what enforcement arrangements would apply. HCC confirmed that ANPR enforcement of bus gates operates in 3 locations within Basingstoke and Winchester. HCC invited operators to highlight problematic sites where bus stops are regularly obstructed by loading/ unloading or parked cars and where bus lanes are being used improperly, which HCC can then flag with the parking enforcement team. Examples from other areas, including red-route enforcement and AI-based TRO monitoring, were noted as potential approaches for future development. Members also stressed the importance of delivering visible benefits quickly for passengers from the LABG funding. HCC emphasised that whilst it is not a 'visible' activity, utilising a proportion of revenue funding towards feasibility study work to design and develop bus lane/ bus gate/ bus interchange improvements is essential in order to fully utilise capital funding in future years, particularly ahead of the planned election of a new mayor for Hampshire and the Solent in May 2028. Doing studies now will help to ensure there is a strong pipeline of deliverable schemes when larger funding opportunities linked to devolution and the new Mayor arise.

- **2026/27 LABG Exec Member Decision Day report for 2 March** - A Decision Day report will go to Cllr Bowerman on 2 March, outlining several proposed investment themes for 2026/27 and 2027/28, utilising the LABG allocations for Hampshire, and summarising the DfT's expectations for how the funding should be used. The report will seek approval to focus on these investment themes and delegated authority for project-level spend. The report will be considered and reviewed by the Universal Services Select Committee. This will help to ensure councillors understand the proposed priorities, the rationale behind these and their alignment with wider policies and EP governance.
- **2026/27 Local Transport Delivery Plan – submitting by 20th March** – The 2026/27 Local Transport Delivery Plan (LTDP) must list all transport schemes to be delivered using consolidated capital and resource funding, covering bus infrastructure, active travel and safety projects, local road improvements, accessibility, decarbonisation and preparatory work for updated Local Transport Plans. A draft LTDP covering the 26/27 financial year must be submitted to the DfT by 20 March 2026, with a revised plan submitted in September 2026 covering plans for the following financial years. The September version of the plan will need to be published.
- **Bus Services Act 2025 – Defining Socially necessary bus services in Hampshire by March 2027** – HCC provided an update on the requirements for this set out in the Bus Services Act 2025. The Act defines socially necessary bus services as those essential for accessing goods, services, employment or social activities, and whose loss would have a significant adverse impact on passengers. By March 2027, local authorities must create a list of the socially necessary local bus services in their areas, following a process of engagement with bus operators, bus users and other stakeholders. Subsequently, LTAs should keep this list of services under regular review and if any of these services are withdrawn or varied should consider whether any alternative arrangements may be made to mitigate the impact of this. GSC commented that almost every bus route in Hampshire could be considered socially necessary, as services would not run otherwise. Stagecoach raised concern that this could lead to token services, such as once-a-day timetables, and stressed that passenger volumes using services should also be considered. HCC noted these observations. HCC highlighted the value of forthcoming DfT guidance on this area. An important consideration is to assess whether alternative services exist where routes have been changed or withdrawn and the need to account for the particular connectivity challenges facing rural communities.
- **Bus Services Act 2025 - Bus Network Accessibility Plan** –The Bus Services Act requires LTAs to produce a Bus Network Accessibility Plan, outlining current provision and how it supports independent travel for people with disabilities. The plan must also identify needs, gaps and

	<p>priorities for improvement, and be developed jointly with operators, disability groups and community stakeholders. Board members noted that while buses themselves are now accessible, there remains substantial work to do at stops to make these accessible with minimal national guidance. HCC directed EP Board members to the following DfT guidance from Dec 2021 - Inclusive Mobility. A Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure.</p>
<p>iii.</p>	<p>HCC update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devolution update – The Government confirmed just before Christmas that Hampshire will not have a mayor until May 2028 and has asked the area to form a non-mayoral Combined Authority. The area would be in line to receive an initial £17m of additional funding for infrastructure and skills improvements (split 50/50 capital and revenue). The revised timeframes for election of a mayor means less funding would be available in the next few years which is disappointing. Senior officers from the four councils are working through the significant changes to the proposed Combined Authority devolution arrangements from the previous proposals. As the devolution proposals on offer from the Government differ from those originally proposed, fresh decisions from the four constituent authorities are required and if the detail is forthcoming in time from the Government, papers would go to February Cabinet and Full Councils on this, otherwise approvals would be sought in the summer after the local elections on 7 May. Overall, there is a lot of detail still to be worked out around funding levels and powers. In response to questions, it was noted that the practical impact of devolution on local transport funding is expected to be limited, as allocations will continue to be passed through existing authorities. Further updates will be provided as the programme develops. • LGR update – the council is awaiting the Government announcement on the proposed number of new unitary councils that would be formed to replace the current 15 councils in the Hampshire and Solent area - expected before the end of March. Internally, work has begun on mapping all services as a step towards understanding how they could be disaggregated. This is a substantial task for an organisation of HCC's scale. HCC will keep the Board informed of progress. • Thursday 7th May 2026 County Council elections - The next full Hampshire County Council elections will take place on Thursday 7 May 2026, following a postponement from May 2025 due to the Devolution Priority Programme. All electoral divisions will elect their County Councillors on this date, alongside other local elections taking place that day.
<p>iv.</p>	<p>HCC provided an update on progress in delivering the EP/BSIP 2025/26 Work Programme across six project themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliability/ Punctuality – Traffic signal bus priority upgrades on Bluestar routes 2, 8 and 9 were delivered in 2025, improving journey times, punctuality and reliability. Early monitoring shows positive results. Various feasibility studies and design work is progressing on a number of bus gate, bus lane, traffic signal upgrades, town/city centre bus stop improvements and bus station enhancements across several Hampshire towns. • More frequent - The programme has delivered 34 discrete service enhancements to date. These include timetable frequency improvements across weekdays, evenings, Saturday and Sunday routes. During 2025, seventeen new service uplifts on 14 commercial routes commenced, with a further 17 enhancements than were introduced during 2024 receiving a further 12 months of BSIP funding, after which most of these will become fully commercial without further BSIP support. In addition, support has also been provided for 18 marginal commercial services, some of which commenced in April 2024 and others in April 2025. • Affordability – Around £200,000 of BSIP+ and 2025/26 Bus Grant funding has delivered local promotional fare initiatives during in 2025, including a £1 single-fare offer on four Andover town routes from late January to mid-July 2025 and a £1 evening fare on Bluestar services from April 2025 to March 2026, jointly funded by Hampshire County Council and Southampton City Council. • Connectivity – The Northern Test Valley Demand-Responsive Transport pilot, launched in April 2025, has seen strong weekday demand (around 350 trips per day), with 8,000 trips taken by the end of December and very high passenger satisfaction. Alongside this, 13 bus route investment plans are complete with all 47 due by November 2026, and a £300k Community Transport Grant

	<p>launched in October 2025 is supporting local solutions in areas with limited services to improve access and reduce isolation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better journey experience – 2025 saw major operator investment in new buses was carried out to improve reliability and capacity, with new Bluestar double-deckers, single-deck buses introduced on the Bluestar 1, 8 and 9 routes, with a number of new high-capacity college double decker buses entering service. There has been further roll out of real-time train departure information on buses so this now covers the Southampton area in addition to the Portsmouth/ Havant/ Fareham area. An Independent Travel Training Grant launched in late 2024 has supported 40 participants through 48 travel training sessions, boosting confidence and enabling more independent bus travel. Countywide audits of bus stops and shelters have been completed, with around £2.5 million invested to in 45 new bus shelters along the A3 corridor (First 7/8 routes), and refurbishment of 105 shelters & over 300 bus stops. The Gosport Travel Safe project is progressing, and has included vegetation clearance, evening private security patrols. Planning work has been undertaken for new CCTV camera locations, new bus shelters and lighting upgrades and new uniformed patrols in Gosport to be delivered in 2026. HCC shared the BRT shelter visuals, and Stagecoach raised a question as to the fully enclosed design at both ends with one means of entrance and exit, particularly regarding personal safety for women and girls. HCC will review these comments internally and provide feedback. HCC’s involvement in the Transport Focus ‘Your Bus Journey’ survey shows rising passenger satisfaction across the Hampshire network. • Decarbonising bus travel - HCC intends to allocate some remaining 2025/26 Bus Grant capital funding to establish a Zero-emission Bus Infrastructure Grant stream, also covering 2026/27 and 2027/28, which operators are invited to bid for on bus routes where most of the route mileage is within Hampshire. Operators are invited to develop strong proposals and include these in their pro-formas to HCC to be submitted by mid-February. Projects seeking 25/26 funding for Zero-Emission Bus Infrastructure need to be fully delivered by the end of March 2027.
<p>v.</p>	<p>Summary of key points discussed at Hampshire EP Forum meeting (19 February):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hampshire’s EP Forum highlighted safety concerns for blind and visually impaired passengers using electric buses and suggested introducing audible alerts. Attendees emphasised the need to upgrade supporting infrastructure at bus stations, improve facilities at new interchanges, and better promote nearby amenities. More targeted offers for families and younger people were seen as important for encouraging modal shift. Priority locations for accessible real-time information with audio features will be developed with Hampshire SLC. Rail–bus interchange improvements, including better timetables, signage and network design, were proposed, alongside a potential pilot. Low public awareness of service frequencies was identified as a barrier, with improved marketing suggested. Community venues could act as local bus information hubs, and strong support was expressed for a 26/27 work programme focused on multiple smaller, targeted schemes.
<p>vi.</p>	<p>AOB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
<p>vii.</p>	<p>The next meeting will take on place on Tuesday 2nd June 2026, 14:00 – 16:00 (via. MS Teams)</p>