



Enhanced Partnership Board Meeting
Friday 23 October 2026, 14:00 – 16:00
Agenda, Actions and Notable Points

Attendees:

CHAIR: Cllr Steve Forster (HCC), Frank Baxter (HCC), Andrew Wilson (HCC), Caroline Mekky (HCC), Martina Olley (HCC), Geoff Hobbs (HCC), Holly Brogden (HCC), Doug Claringbold (First Bus), David Lee Kong (Go South Coast), Alex Barrett (Community First), Marc Reddy (Stagecoach South), Robert Williams (Reading Buses – representing other operators)

Apologies:

Cllr Kirsty North (HCC), Natalie Wigman (HCC), Nawal Atiq (National Highways), Ed Wills (Go South Coast), Jon Bramley (HCC).

Agenda:

1. Welcome & Introductions
2. Review of Actions from the last EP Board meeting (2 June 2026)
3. Round the table updates (operators and CTOs)
4. LABG funding and DfT announcements
 - 4.1. BSIP and EP Plan/Scheme update (by March 2027)
 - 4.2. Socially Necessary Local Services (SNLS)
 - 4.3. Network Accessibility Plan (NAP) guidance
 - 4.4. £2 capped fare re-instatement from 1 Jan 2027 & 9:30am Mon-Fri time restriction for disabled bus pass holders removed from 1 April
5. HCC update
 - 5.1. Devolution & LGR update
6. EP/BSIP Delivery Progress update on 2026/27 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. new stops on Eclipse, TSP
 - 6.6. Greener - decarbonising bus travel
 - 6.7. Listening to bus users' needs
 - 6.8. Bus It! Fare Play – joint marketing campaign
 - 6.9. 2026 Your Bus Journey survey – headlines so far
7. Roadworks and Traffic Management
8. Summary of key points discussed at Hampshire EP Forum meeting (12 October 2026)
 - 8.1. Updating Hampshire BSIP (Mar 2027) and NAP feedback
9. AOB
10. Aldershot Depot Tour **from 15:30** (*online attendees to leave the meeting; in-person attendees invited to view Stagecoach's electric vehicle charging infrastructure before departing*).

Actions

	Action	Responsibility
1	AW/FB to liaise with West Berkshire Council to get update on AWE Aldermaston expansion plans and provide an update to Reading Buses and the Board.	HCC
2	HCC to continue discussions on funding support arrangements linked to increased operator costs and communicate the rationale behind any	HCC

	decisions made and update the bus operators at the EP WG meetings accordingly.	
3	EP Working Group to give through to projects/ initiatives delivered by Hampshire's Enhanced Partnership that are innovative or groundbreaking that may be suitable for submission for national bus awards ahead of next year's award season (of ~autumn 2027).	EP Working Group

Notable points

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I.	<p>Round the table updates were given from bus operators, CT operators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stagecoach South – Stagecoach South reported softer summer patronage, largely attributed to the exceptionally warm weather, although passenger numbers performed well during September. The DfT free child travel scheme generated additional demand and was generally successful, with only isolated incidents of anti-social behaviour. Staffing levels remain stable. The rollout of TFT next-stop announcements technology continues across the fleet. The operator also updated the Board on its decarbonisation programme, noting that 22 electric vehicles entered service on two routes from Aldershot depot during August after delay relating to completing the power grid connection by the DNO. A further 11 electric vehicles are expected in Portsmouth in early 2027, alongside ongoing work to electrify Portsmouth Depot and support the future deployment of around 75 additional electric vehicles by a target date of summer/autumn 2028. The availability of sufficient electricity grid capacity and connection delays were discussed, and Board representatives agreed both are practical barriers to bus fleet electrification. May need UTG or bus industry umbrella organisations to carry out co-ordinated and targeted lobbying of Government to raise these issues up the political agenda. Traffic congestion remains a key challenge affecting service reliability and attractiveness, whilst rising operating costs through sustained high fuel prices and the DfT reimbursement method to operators for reintroducing the £2 capped single bus fare are to be concerns. First Bus – Doug Claringbold echoed concerns regarding the impact of hot weather over the summer heatwaves on passenger demand, particularly concessionary travel. Despite this, operational performance and reliability remained strong. Drawing on experience from other operating areas, he advised that previous free child travel schemes had resulted in sustained increases in young people's bus use and believed the August initiative was likely to produce similar longer-term benefits. The operator also confirmed that First Bus continues to see strong operational and reliability benefits from electric vehicles. Go South Coast (GSC) - GSC advised that the free child travel scheme had been a success and been a positive experience overall. It was reported that service enhancements introduced during September, particularly the Bluestar 26 serving Whiteley, were performing above expectations. An order has been placed for electric vehicles capable of operating the Activ8 service between Salisbury and Andover and other routes. The Board heard that Go South Coast is working with Southampton City Council and other large electricity users in the city to explore options for increasing local electricity capacity. Concerns were expressed about the risk of a gap in investment if electric vehicle mandates are introduced before supporting infrastructure becomes available. However, operators confirmed that electric vehicles now in operation were proving reliable in service and delivering maintenance savings. Community First (CF) - CF reported continued growth across Community First services. Demand responsive transport services in Andover and Portsmouth continue to perform strongly and recent customer satisfaction surveys have delivered Net Promoter Scores in the low 90s. The KB1 and Route 44 tendered services had benefited from the free child travel initiative, and both recorded strong passenger growth during September. Community First continues to actively explore opportunities for minibuss fleet electrification and is monitoring developments in the electric minibuss market, although limited power availability remains a challenge. Positive discussions have taken place with parish councils in two localities to scope out possible Community Led Transport

	<p>Grant projects and grant funding applications. Recruitment remains stable; however, the long-term challenge associated with the removal of automatic D1 licence entitlement was highlighted as a significant concern for the community transport sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Buses – Reading Buses advised that the Basingstoke-Heathrow via Frimley Flightline service had entered its fourth year of operation and continued to perform well. Additional capacity had been introduced during peak periods from Heathrow, and a new fleet of coaches had been deployed, although demand is already placing pressure on vehicle capacity. Concerns were raised regarding the consultation on the future of The Clere School and the potential implications for school transport demand. Reading Buses also highlighted the importance of understanding future expansion plans associated with AWE and the potential transport impacts arising from increased employment in the area. In addition, the operator advised that Reading Buses is rolling out safety awareness and Violence Against Women and Girls training to staff. Fuel prices remained a significant concern for the operator. • The Board also discussed the DfT allocation of additional funding linked to rising operating costs. Andrew Wilson confirmed that Hampshire County Council was considering how this funding could best be allocated and that operators would be treated consistently. Operators requested that the rationale behind any funding decisions is clearly communicated.
II.	<p>LABG funding and DfT announcements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSIP and EP Plan/Scheme update (by March 2027) – Members received an update on the need to refresh Hampshire's Bus Service Improvement Plan, Enhanced Partnership Plan and Enhanced Partnership Scheme by the end of March 2027 to reflect recent legislative changes and new duties on LTAs. Draft documents are expected to be considered by the EP Working Group in Jan 27 and EP Forum in Feb 2027 before being brought to the Board for formal approval on 26 February 2027. For the EP Plan/ Scheme this will go through the formal engagement process set out in DfT legislation and guidance. • Socially Necessary Local Services (SNLS) – HCC provided an update on the requirement to identify and publish socially necessary local services by 31 March 2027. Officers confirmed that HCC is using both the DfT methodology and additional locally commissioned analytical work to assess accessibility gaps and identify locations where additional services may be required. Consideration will also be given to the role of Section 22 community transport services within the framework. Stagecoach highlighted the importance of liaising with neighbouring authorities to ensure consistency for cross-boundary services. • Network Accessibility Plan (NAP) guidance – An update was provided on development of Hampshire's Network Accessibility Plan, which must be finalised and published by 1 April 2027. The plan will assess existing accessibility provision across the bus network, evaluate how effectively the network supports independent travel for disabled passengers, and establish future improvement actions. Continued engagement with bus users and accessibility groups will be a key part of developing the Plan. The Plan needs to cover end-to-end journeys and be reviewed at least every 3 years. • £2 capped fare re-instatement from 1 Jan 2027 & 9:30am Mon-Fri time restriction for disabled bus pass holders removed from 1 April – The Board noted the Government's intention to reintroduce the £2 fare cap from 1 January 2027. Members also noted that from 1 April 2027 the existing 9.30am weekday restriction applied to disabled concessionary pass holders will be removed, allowing all-day travel. Operators welcomed greater support for passengers but highlighted ongoing challenges created by differing concessionary travel arrangements across neighbouring authorities.
III.	<p>HCC update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGR and Devolution update – Members received an update on devolution arrangements and the work of the Combined County Authority. It was noted that governance arrangements are now established and operating. The Board also heard that proposals relating to Local Government Reorganisation had been withdrawn by Government and no further activity was currently

	<p>anticipated. Members agreed that maintaining strong partnership working across transport authorities would remain important regardless of future governance arrangements.</p>
IV.	<p>Members received a comprehensive update on delivery against the 2026/27 EP and BSIP work programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster - updates were provided on bus priority schemes, traffic signal priority initiatives and reliability interventions across the network. Ongoing engagement with operators regarding congestion hotspots and network performance was noted. • More Frequent - members noted that BSIP funding currently supports a significant number of service enhancements across Hampshire and that several routes have demonstrated encouraging passenger growth since implementation, meaning that the majority of routes require less financial support year on year. Members welcomed the progress made and recognised the importance of maintaining momentum where enhanced services are demonstrating value for money. • More Affordable - the Board received updates on current fare initiatives, including discounted ticket promotions and temporary fare offers – covering the South Hampshire and Basingstoke areas. Discussion focused on how local affordability initiatives will interact with the reintroduction of the national £2 fare cap from January 2027, with operators highlighting the need to ensure future interventions complement rather than duplicate national schemes. • Better Connected - the Board reviewed the performance of recently launched and enhanced services supported through BSIP investment including Go South Coast's Bluestar 26 (Whiteley - Botley - Hedge End - Southampton) and N9 Night bus (Southampton - Langley), First Bus's X3 (Fareham - Portsmouth) and Stagecoach South's Service 8 (Yateley - Farnborough). Positive early patronage growth was reported, and members welcomed the encouraging early results and noted the role these services play in improving access to employment, education, leisure opportunities and key transport interchanges. The Board also recognised the importance of continued cross-boundary collaboration between operators and neighbouring local authorities to ensure passengers experience a more connected and integrated public transport network. • Better Journey Experience - members noted progress on the Eclipse corridor, including new stops, shelters and real-time information improvements. Updates were also provided on accessibility initiatives, bus shelter investment, vegetation clearance and the Gosport Travel Safe programme. Discussion also covered Hampshire's ongoing accessibility work with organisations including the Thomas Pocklington Trust, ensuring that future infrastructure improvements better meet the needs of disabled passengers. • Greener - members received updates on fleet decarbonisation programmes across Hampshire. Operators reported positive experiences from existing electric bus deployments, with reliability and vehicle performance generally exceeding expectations. Stagecoach and Go South Coast provided updates on electric vehicle procurement and depot infrastructure projects, while Community First discussed future opportunities within the community transport sector. Whilst progress was welcomed, the Board agreed that electricity network capacity remains one of the biggest risks to achieving wider bus fleet electrification. Several operators highlighted delays associated with securing grid connections and electricity supply upgrades, noting that these issues are being experienced nationally. Members agreed that continued engagement with energy providers and support from Local Authorities will be required to support the industry's transition towards zero-emission fleets. • Listening to Bus Users' Needs - The Board received an update on passenger engagement activity undertaken throughout summer 2026. This included passenger surveys, focus groups, community engagement events and recent engagement events during Catch the Bus Month delivered in partnership with operators. Members heard that engagement remains a key component of the Enhanced Partnership and is providing valuable insights into the priorities of both existing and potential bus users. • Bus It! Fare Play – joint marketing campaign - Members received a presentation summarising the outcomes of the Bus It! Fare Play marketing campaign. The campaign promoted affordable bus travel opportunities and was delivered collaboratively between HCC, SCC and local bus operators.

	<p>Members agreed that the campaign demonstrated the value of partnership working and provided useful lessons for future joint promotional activity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2026 Your Bus Journey survey – headlines so far – Headline findings from the ongoing 2026 Your Bus Journey survey was presented. Members noted that overall passenger satisfaction remains high and continues to compare favourably against national benchmarks. Officers reported that Hampshire currently records approximately 93% overall passenger satisfaction as well as improvements recorded across several measures. HCC officers confirmed further survey results will become available as additional data is collected and analysed throughout the remainder of the survey period at subsequent EP WG meetings.
V.	<p>Roadworks and Traffic Management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members discussed the continued impact of roadworks on bus service reliability across Hampshire. Officers advised that Hampshire County Council continues to work closely with highways colleagues, utility companies and contractors to improve coordination, communication and advance notice of works affecting bus services. The Board heard that further One.Network training opportunities were being explored following feedback from operators. Discussion also considered potential opportunities to strengthen the focus on bus impacts within highway planning processes, including examining options for dedicated resource and making better use of data to assess disruption. Members agreed that reliable and timely information remains critical to minimising the impact of roadworks on passengers.
VI.	<p>Summary of key points discussed at Hampshire EP Forum meeting (12 October):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board received feedback obtained from the EP Forum. Members heard that forum participants broadly welcomed investment delivered through BSIP and recognised improvements across the network. Key themes discussed included accessibility, reliability, affordability and improving connectivity between different modes of transport. Members also considered feedback received regarding the forthcoming refresh of the Bus Service Improvement Plan and development of the Network Accessibility Plan.
VII.	<p>AOB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members discussed opportunities to further promote Hampshire's partnership achievements through industry awards and recognition programmes. It was noted that Hampshire has delivered a substantial programme of investment and improvement activities through the Enhanced Partnership, including service enhancements, passenger growth, fleet decarbonisation projects, accessibility initiatives and collaborative marketing campaigns. • The Board agreed that potential future entries/submissions for bus awards should be considered and developed further, as appropriate through the Enhanced Partnership Working Group. • The publication of updated Department for Transport bus statistics was also noted, with members expressing interest in reviewing the results when available.
VIII.	<p>The next meeting will take on place on Friday 26th February 2027, 14:00 – 16:00 (via. MS Teams)</p>