



Enhanced Partnership Forum Meeting

Wednesday 20th May 2026, 14:00 – 16:00

Agenda, Actions and Notable Points

Attendees: Andrew Wilson (HCC), Caroline Mekky (HCC), Martina Olley (HCC), Geoff Hobbs (HCC) Holly Brogden (HCC), Andrew Broster (Gosport Borough Council), George Burton (First Bus), Brian Byrne (Basingstoke and Deane District Council), Mark Cohen (Basingstoke and Deane District Council), George Cooper (Stagecoach), Nick Farthing (Hampshire Community Rail Partnership), Phil Gagg (Winchester Action on Climate Change), David Garney (Southampton City Council), Lucy Maggs Krebs (HCC Disability Network), Andy Macfarlane (HCC Disability Network), Dan Massey (Winchester City Council), Peter Matthews (First Bus), Izaaz Munshi (Dorset County Council), Rebecca Lockwood Norris (Wiltshire Council), Cllr Jerry Pett (Winchester City Council - representing Winchester Southern Parishes), Dave Smith (Thomas Pocklington Trust), Cali Sparks (Eastleigh Borough Council), Richard Tyldsley (Go South Coast), and John Woodson (Bus User).

Apologies: Kevin Brolan (BCP Council), Mapenzi Ciurtin (Test Valley Borough Council), Phil Dominey (South Western Railway), Simon Fisher (Thames Valley Buses), Kate Healey (Hampshire Sight Loss Council), Stuart Jones (Bus User), Mark Miller (Hampshire Community Rail Partnership), Peter Moody (Hampshire Sight Loss Council), James O’Neill (Stagecoach), Brogan Rehill (Age Concern), Simon Rowland (White Bus), Adam Tewkesbury (Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust), Nicola Waight (Bus User).

Location: Mitchell, EII Court Podium, Hampshire County Council (Queen Elizabeth II), Winchester, SO23 8BH with stakeholders unable to attend in person joining the meeting on MS Teams

Agenda:

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Actions from the last meeting (19 January 2026)
3. Bus operator updates (Bus Operators)
4. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Devolution update
5. Recent achievements
6. DfT Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG) allocation and delivery plan
7. DfT guidance – high level overview
 - 7.1. Enhanced Partnership Report & EP Manual publication
 - 7.2. Socially Necessary Local Services (SNLS)
 - 7.3. Network Accessibility Plan (NAP)
8. Round the Table Discussion & stakeholder feedback (All)
 - 8.1. The Bus Services Act requires Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to define a network of socially necessary fixed-route bus services by March 2027. Guidance can be found here: Bus enhanced partnerships - GOV.UK. What key factors should the County Council consider when deciding how to prioritise and define this network?
 - 8.2. The Bus Services Act requires LTAs to consult upon and publish a Bus Network Accessibility Plan. This plan must assess current provision and set out how we will improve access so that people with disabilities can travel on buses independently, safely, and in reasonable comfort. What are your organisations priorities that you would like to see incorporated into our Bus Network Accessibility Plan?
9. Any Other Business and date of next EP Forum meeting (October 2026)

Actions

	Action	Responsibility
1.	Forum attendees are invited to email hampshire.bus.strategy@hants.gov.uk with any further thoughts and suggestions regarding Socially Necessary Local	EP Forum members

Services (SNLS) and the Network Accessibility Plan (NAP) at any time. All feedback will be compiled and considered.	
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Notable points

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i.	<p>The operators provided the following bus fleet and timetable updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stagecoach – 22 double-deck electric buses are expected to enter service around July on Routes 1 (Old Dean–Aldershot) and 20 (Guildford–Aldershot), featuring enhanced accessibility. The vehicles arrived in March, with rollout pending grid connection for charging, and will allow existing buses to be cascaded, with the oldest withdrawn. Improvements to onboard information are ongoing, including next stop announcements and a rollout of TFT screens (around half the fleet by October). Real-time systems and the journey planning app are also being enhanced, including integration of other operators’ services. Concerns were raised about non-functioning next stop information in New Alresford and inaccuracies in real-time information during roadworks, with inconsistencies between app, website and stop notices creating accessibility risks. Stagecoach confirmed remaining older systems will be upgraded shortly, with work underway to improve data accuracy, diversion handling and responsiveness. It was noted that improved coordination via One.Network is helping, although challenges remain with the timing of utility works. Issues were also raised regarding outdated timetable information in Winchester and limited mobile signal affecting access to digital information; operators requested locations to address these. Further feedback highlighted that real-time systems do not always reflect late-running buses effectively; improvements are expected as new systems are implemented. Positive feedback was given on Route 69 improvements – particularly the Sunday services continuing to Fareham south of Bishops Waltham, and lack of late evening connections with last rail services from London on 64 route at Alton was raised. • First Bus – Recent activity includes supporting Hover Travel’s transition to a summer timetable and aligning services, as well as plans to resume the Park and Ride 3 service from 6 June through to mid-September. A commercial decision was also implemented to reduce frequencies on Routes 2, X4 and X5, with minimal impact on patronage. From 7 June, Service 5 will see additional evening journeys and improved Sunday frequency, while E1/E2 services will benefit from increased Sunday peak frequency. Changes to the 9/9A services will provide a more consistent 20-minute frequency on the 9 and more legible routing. Further service improvements, including potential express services, are currently under development. A site for a new purpose-built EV depot has been secured in Hillsea, which will bring benefits for South East Hampshire. Mark Lovell new appropriate contact for operational queries following staff reconfiguration at First. • Go South Coast - Significant work has been undertaken over the past six months to improve audio-visual systems in preparation for PSVAR requirements, including investment in programming resources and system upgrades. Work is also ongoing to integrate rail information, with live departure times now displayed onboard on the approach to rail stations. A community fund offering £750 grants three times a year is available via the website, and the £1 evening fare offer has been extended to March 2027, continuing to drive strong patronage. Service improvements from September will focus on reliability, alongside the introduction of a new hourly route from Southampton to Whiteley (via Hedge End, Botley and North Whiteley), operating from 7am–10pm. It was noted that provision for new developments should be supported through the planning process (as set out in the NPPF), rather than relying solely on BSIP funding, and questions were raised about whether bus provision had been sufficiently planned prior to development at Whiteley. Further updates include service enhancements across the network, including a new night service (B*9) on the Waterside, and ongoing fleet investment with nearly new vehicles being cascaded. Feedback was raised on audio-visual announcements, particularly low volume levels; it was confirmed that volume is standardised across vehicle types and cannot currently be adjusted by the driver during the day to match background noise levels, though feedback will be reviewed. Go South Coast invited EP Forum attendees to share locations where audio-visual systems are not working or are too quiet, so that issues can be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
ii.	Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Devolution update:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion took place on the proposed Mayoral Strategic Authority arrangements, including responsibilities for public transport. It was noted that details are still being worked through, including governance of key elements such as concessionary travel, shelters and real-time information, with a desire for consistency across areas. It was highlighted that, while planning responsibilities will sit with unitary authorities, strong coordination will be required to ensure new developments are supported by appropriate bus services. Existing cross-boundary work was recognised as positive, with a shared aim to maintain a network-based approach to public transport. It was also noted that staff and current work programmes, including Local Transport Plans, will continue into the new arrangements, ensuring continuity rather than starting from scratch.
iii.	<p>Recent achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HCC provided an update on progress since the January EP Forum, highlighting successful grant funding awards to bus operators (following a competitive application and assessment process) including the Zero Emission Bus Infrastructure Fund and funding to support services to major development areas. Updates were also shared on the Community Transport Grant and parish bus shelter fund. Examples of delivery were presented, including newly installed onboard next stop screens, real-time displays at bus stops, and new and refurbished shelters in a number of areas. The North Test Valley Transport on Demand service was noted as a success, reaching the milestone of 10,000 passenger journeys in early March. Hampshire also improved its' overall passenger satisfaction score from 86% in 2024 to 90% in 2025, and saw its' ranking go up ten places to 9th out of 43 authorities in the 2025 Transport Focus "Your Bus Journey" survey. Ongoing support for services was highlighted through a continued programme of pump-priming for service enhancements, with support for 29 services agreed until summer 2028, some of which had received BSIP support since spring 2024, and some were now able to continue on a fully commercial basis. The Hampshire Annual Progress Report for 2025 was published in March. Finally, details were shared of the upcoming joint marketing campaign, "Bus It, Fare Play", developed in partnership with HCC, SCC, Go South Coast, First Solent and Stagecoach South with BSIP funding from HCC and SCC. Launching on 1 June, the campaign will use a multi-channel approach including social media video, posters, out-of-home advertising and radio, produced by Bauer Media.
iv.	<p>DfT Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG) allocation and delivery plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HCC provided an overview of Hampshire's Local Authority Bus Grant (LABG) allocation 2026/27 – 2029/30 and the capital and revenue investment themes. The work programme for 26/27 and 27/28 was agreed in the 2 March Executive Member for Highways & Passenger Transport Decision Day report. A Local Transport Delivery Plan covering all aspects of HCC transport investment was submitted to the DfT in late March and will be finalised and published in September 2026.
v.	<p>DfT guidance – high level overview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced Partnership Report & EP Manual publication - DfT guidance published in April included a review of the effectiveness of Enhanced Partnerships in England to date, identifying common success themes including being passenger-focused, collaborative, accountable and ambitious. Updated guidance has been issued, including processes for defining socially necessary local services. The Government's vision for buses emphasises services that are attractive, accessible and widely used, with passenger needs at the centre. New minimum EP standards were outlined, covering areas such as multi-operator ticketing, data transparency, coordinated timetable changes, accessibility, bus priority enforcement and maintenance of infrastructure. All LTAs are expected to meet these standards by 31 March 2027. An upcoming EP Manual will provide further practical guidance and examples of best practice. Socially Necessary Local Services (SNLS) - Socially Necessary Local Services (SNLS) were discussed, highlighting the importance of protecting key local routes that communities rely on and ensuring access to jobs, education and healthcare. It was noted that, under the Bus Services Act 2025, new duties are placed on LTAs to identify and publish a list of services considered socially necessary by early April 2027. Within the Enhanced Partnership, operators will be required to notify the LTA if the viability of a listed service is likely to change within 12 months, enabling early consideration of mitigations. The list will be based on robust data and evidence of local need, with input from forum

	<p>members helping to inform how services are prioritised and defined across Hampshire, and supporting wider aims such as reducing isolation and improving accessibility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network Accessibility Plan (NAP) - The requirement for all LTAs to produce a Network Accessibility Plan (NAP) was discussed. This requires a shift in focus towards network-wide accessibility rather than focusing solely on vehicle compliance. Local transport authorities and operators are required to identify barriers across the end-to-end journey, including infrastructure, information and staff training, with a strong emphasis on inclusive design and the needs of disabled passengers. It was noted that plans must evaluate current provision, assess how well services support independent, safe and comfortable travel, and set out clear, actionable improvements. NAPs will be formally reviewed following significant service changes or at least every three years, allowing them to build on successes and lessons learned. Forum members will be invited to provide feedback on priorities to be incorporated into the plan.
vi.	<p>Round the Table Discussion & stakeholder feedback (All)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A roundtable discussion invited stakeholder feedback on priorities for defining Socially Necessary Local Services (SNLS) and shaping the Bus Network Accessibility Plan (NAP). It was confirmed that SNLS should reflect the needs of all users, including older and disabled passengers, and consider factors such as rurality, isolation and access to key services. • Concerns were raised that the current SNLS approach, as set out in guidance, risks focusing on existing services and potential reductions to these rather than seeking to identify and fill gaps in the current level of provision. It was suggested that all of the existing bus network could largely be considered socially necessary, with a need to shift towards a more aspirational, future-focused network based on unmet need and demand rather than historic bus network provision alone. • Stakeholders highlighted significant gaps in current provision, particularly in rural areas where some communities have little or no service, alongside concerns about reliability and limited usefulness of some existing routes. It was noted that current provision may not reflect true demand, with potential latent need not fully understood. • The importance of connectivity was strongly emphasised, including improved multi-operator information, coordination between services and better integration with rail. Opportunities to grow patronage through stronger bus–rail links were highlighted, alongside concerns that withdrawal of area-wide timetable information has made journey planning more difficult for passengers. • Discussion also covered potential future delivery models, including franchising and enhanced partnership approaches, with a need to clearly define outcomes and priorities based on population, travel patterns and demand. It was recognised that bus services should be treated as essential infrastructure, although funding constraints remain a key consideration. • It was agreed that SNLS should be underpinned by clear criteria, balancing social need and financial viability, and that further input from stakeholders would help inform development of an evidence-based and aspirational network.
vii.	<p>Any Other Business and date of next EP Forum meeting (May 2026)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upcoming LABG-funded grant opportunities, including the continuation of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Independent Travel Training Grant Stream (2026/27–2027/28) ○ Parish Council Bus Shelter Grant Scheme ○ Community-Led Transport Grant <p>Grants will be made available here in due course (~late June/July): List of grants and funding Hampshire County Council</p>
viii.	<p>The next Hants EP Forum (hybrid) meeting is scheduled for Monday 12 October, from 14:00 to 16:00 in advance of the next Hampshire EP Board (23 October 2026).</p>