

National Bus Strategy

Bus Service Improvement Plan

September 2024



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1. Our Bus Vision

1.1. Introduction to Slough

This Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) covers the entire administrative area of Slough Borough Council illustrated at Figure 1-1. The Council prepared a BSIP for the Borough in 2021 following consultation with neighbouring authorities. Whilst many of the bus services in the borough operate into neighbouring areas, Slough differs from its neighbours significantly in terms of its geography and socio-demographic profile and it is appropriate that this Plan reflects the Borough.

This 2024 BSIP updates the Plan originally adopted in 2021.

Figure 1-1: Slough Administrative Area



Slough is home to 158,500 residents (2021 Census), the Borough's population is growing faster than its neighbours (13% compared to average increases of 7.5% in the South East). Slough is the fifth most densely populated local authority area in England, outside London. Slough has a comparatively young population with an average age of 34 (compared with 41 in the South East). Social deprivation is an issue in the Borough with 71% of the area falling below the national average Index of Multiple Deprivation. The bus service in Slough must therefore respond to the needs of a growing, younger population.

In 2022/23, 3.6 million bus journeys were made in the Borough. This is 78% of the number of journeys made in 2019/20 illustrating that passenger demand has not yet recovered to pre pandemic levels. This represents 22.7 journeys per head of population, which, whilst higher than neighbouring Windsor & Maidenhead, Bracknell Forest and Buckinghamshire, is lower than the average for the South East (29.3).

The bus network in Slough mostly comprises services which start and finish in neighbouring areas. This is because the town is both an origin and a destination for commuting journeys across a wider region. Slough town centre is the key hub in the district served by most bus services. Heathrow Airport is a major employer in the region and a destination for commuting journeys by Slough residents. Slough Trading Estate located 2.5 km to the west of the Town Centre is also a significant commuting destination.

The A4 corridor is the focus of existing bus priority facilities in Slough, intersecting the town centre adjacent to the rail station. Traffic levels are high in the town due to its proximity to the motorway network and nearby attractors including Heathrow airport.

Interchange between local bus and rail services is a factor as Slough rail station offers links to central London, Reading and other destinations and has experienced an uplift in provision following the opening of the Elizabeth Line. Local rail stations at Langley and Burnham also offer links to London and Reading.

Links between Slough and nearby other towns including Windsor, Maidenhead, Uxbridge, Hounslow, Bracknell and High Wycombe are key factors in bus provision in the region.

An Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme was adopted in June 2022 and forms the basis upon which the Council and bus operators collaborate to deliver the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Figure 1-2: First service passing St Ethelbert's Church in Slough town centre.



1.2. Our Bus Vision

'An attractive and accessible bus service will support Slough's ambition to be a clean, healthy, and prosperous town where residents can live healthier, safer, and more independent lives and our young people can thrive.'

We will do this by:

- establishing a successful partnership with bus operators harnessing public and private sector investment
- working closely with employers and neighbouring authorities to ensure the bus service supports our growing economy
- ensuring that bus journeys are reliable, helping them through traffic congestion
- supporting bus operators to contribute to our targets to improve air quality and reduce emissions.

2. Current Bus Offer to Passengers

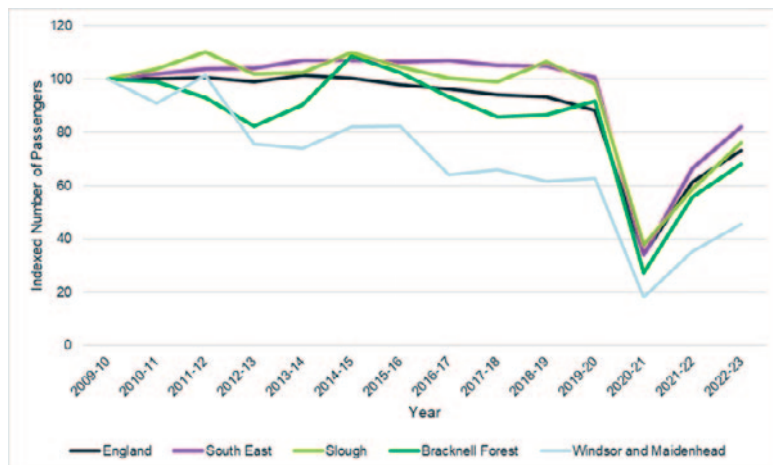
This section describes the bus service offer to Slough, assesses its quality and suitability for Slough residents, and analyses the impact of background highway and socio-demographic conditions on buses. At several points, it refers to “Slough BSIP Baseline Evidence Base” (SBBEB) to which the reader is referred for more detail. This is provided alongside this BSIP document.

At the end of each section is a brief commentary on the existing situation and how it relates to the aspirations of the National Bus Strategy.

2.1. Current Levels of Bus Use in Slough

The graph below (SSBEB) outlines the number of bus passenger journeys indexed to 2009/10 in Slough alongside comparable local authorities and the South East region (excluding London). Slough follows the overall regional trend, with post pandemic recovery slightly higher than neighbouring authorities.

Figure 2-1: Change in bus patronage, indexed to 2009/10



Analysis of Existing Local Bus Services Compared to BSIP Outcomes

2.1.1. Operator Context

Slough’s bus network is provided by several operators, predominantly commercially, with some routes operating under contract to Slough Borough Council and other authorities.

Bus route 81 is procured by Transport for London and operated as part of the London bus network to fulfil TfL’s duty to secure local bus links to meet the needs of Greater London.

The largest operator is First Beeline, which operates a range of services from a depot in Slough.

Thames Valley Buses (a subsidiary of Reading Buses) operates several services in the town from a depot in Bracknell. Reading Buses operate one service through Slough to London.

Carousel Buses (a Go-Ahead company) operates services to Slough from its depot in High Wycombe.

Aylesbury-based Redline Buses operates a service to Wexham Park Hospital.

2.1.2. Bus Service Supply

Most of the population (95% - see SBBEB 6.1.3) are within 400 metres of at least an hourly bus service. More than a third of residents (37%) have access to a bus operating 4 times an hour or more frequently during weekdays.

The highest frequency service is TfL's route 81 with up to 6 buses per hour (bph) at peak times. Transport for London provides this service in fulfilment of its duties under section 181 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 and its provision reflects the high volume of movement between Hounslow, Hillingdon, and schools in Slough, but also to key employment locations such as Poyle Industrial Estate.

Heathrow Airport is a key destination for Slough bus services. First operates service A4 which provides 4 buses per hour linking Cippenham, Slough Town Centre and Heathrow Central Bus Station. First also operate service 7 providing 3 buses per hour between Britwell, Slough Town Centre and Heathrow Airport Terminal 5. Thames Valley Buses operate 2 buses per hour on its 703 route between Bracknell, Windsor, Slough and Heathrow Terminal 5 and 1 per hour on its service 5. First service 8 operates 2 buses per hour to Terminal 5 via Windsor and Staines. Services A4 and 703 provide overnight links to Heathrow.

There is a 4 bus per hour shuttle bus service WP1 between Slough Town Centre and Wexham Park Hospital situated on the northern fringe of Slough. Hospital visitors and workers from elsewhere in the town need to interchange onto this service in the town centre. The hospital is also served by Carousel from Amersham and First services from Maidenhead and Bracknell.

Other local links are provided by service 12/13 connecting the north west area of the town with the Town Centre via the Trading Estate and service 6 to the north east of the Borough. Thames Valley services 2 and 5 link areas to the south of the Borough with the Town Centre.

Thames Valley Buses provide links between Slough and Windsor town centres. Carousel Buses provide regular bus links to Uxbridge, High Wycombe, and Amersham. First provides links to Maidenhead and High Wycombe.

Bus journey speeds are relatively slow. In the accompanying document (SBBEB 6.5.2) we have identified journey time isochrones to the town centre. A comparison with 2021 (SBBEB figures 6.14 and 6.15) shows some journey time reductions on the A4 to the east of Slough but increases on other radial roads.

Current service situation compared to National Bus Strategy aspiration.

"More frequent; intensive services on key corridors" - only service 81 provides a 'walk-up' frequency every 10 minutes. Several services combine on the A4 Bath Road to provide a 'walk up' frequency to the Town Centre. Buses run to Heathrow and Wexham Park Hospital every 15 minutes.

"A comprehensive network" - most residents live within walking distance of a bus service to the town centre; however, interchange is needed there to many onward destinations including the local hospital. Slough Town Centre is connected to most nearby towns at least once per hour.

"Faster and more reliable" - bus speeds are lower than average due to traffic congestion.

2.1.3. Bus Fares

In 2024, all bus operators in the Borough were participants in the Government's £2 maximum single fare scheme.

Passengers pay using cash or contactless payment on board the bus and each operator has a mobile app for pre-purchased travel using their services.

There is no multi-operator product in the Borough and passengers purchasing day or period products are restricted to the respective operator's services. Most operator apps enable passengers to pre-purchase blocks of trips and/or day tickets in advance at a cheaper rate. All operators offer small discounts for app purchase to incentivise pre-purchase and hence reduce boarding times.

Ticket products vary between operators who operate fare zones appropriate to their service operation. The cost of day and season ticket prices therefore varies depending upon the operator and the areas covered by their respective fare zones. Some operators provide discounted season tickets to Heathrow employees. Service 81 operates under the TfL fare structure which is generally cheaper than commercial fares.

Table 2.1 illustrates how the cost of adult day and period tickets varies between bus operators and their respective fare zones. This analysis indicates that, whilst single fares are currently capped at £3, passengers purchasing day and season tickets in Slough pay more than those in similar towns in the region. There is concern that all bus passengers in the Borough are paying more than their counterparts elsewhere in the region. Bus operators advise this is due to higher operating costs in Slough in particular wages.

Passengers making multi-leg journeys using different operators are disadvantaged by the absence of multi-operator tickets. This is particularly the case for those interchanging in the town centre from First, Thames Valley or Carousel services who must then buy a ticket on the Redline WP1 service to travel two miles to the regional hospital at Wexham Park.

Despite the shorter journey times, local rail fares are competitive with bus fares. The off-peak return train fare for the six-minute journey between Slough and Windsor is £3.60 (£4.60 anytime return) whereas a 17-minute bus journey would cost £4 return even with the fare cap.

Table 2-1: Bus Fare Comparison

Area	Operator	Day Ticket (on bus)	Weekly Ticket (app)	Carnet Product (app)
Slough & Windsor	First Beeline	£6.50	£20	10 single journeys £25
Slough & Windsor	Thames Valley Buses (cheaper rates on service 5)	£6	£20	5 days £20
Slough/ Maidenhead/ Reading	Carousel	£5.20	£19	5 days £22
Slough (WP1 only)	Redline	No product	£15	No product
Greater London	Transport for London	£4.65 (daily cap)	£21.80 (weekly cap)	No product
Bracknell	Thames Valley	£5.20	£19	5 days £19
Basingstoke	Stagecoach	£5	£20	No product
Reading	Reading Buses	£3.50	£17	10 single journeys £17
High Wycombe	Carousel Zone A	£4.40	£17.50	5 days £18.50

Slough Borough Council does not enhance the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme for older and disabled people beyond its mandated operation between 09:30 and 23:00 on weekdays and all-day at weekends and Public Holidays.

Young person's bus fares are provided on a commercial basis with a variation in age of eligibility and discount as illustrated in Table 2.2.

Table 2-2: Young Person's Bus Fares

Operator	Age definition	Young person day ticket	Full price day
First in Berkshire	Under 16	£3.50	£6.50
Thames Valley Buses	Under 18	£3.70	£6
Carousel	Under 18	£3.50	£5.20
Redline	Under 16	No day ticket	
Transport for London	Under 15 Under 18	Free to all Free London residents only	£4.65

Current fares situation compared to National Bus Strategy aspiration.

- “Fares must be lower and simpler”- day and season ticket prices are higher in Slough than in nearby towns and products vary between operators.
- “Passengers should not have to buy a new ticket when changing buses” - they do have to buy a new ticket in Slough due to the absence of a multi-operator ticketing scheme.

- Common tickets, passes and daily capping should be available on all services irrespective of operator - there is no commonality of ticket products and arrangements for young person fares vary between operators. Several operators offer daily capping limited to their own services.
- “All buses should accept contactless payment” - contactless payment is accepted on buses in Slough.

Figure 2-2: TFL service 81 in Colnbrook



2.1.5. Bus Passenger Information

Much information is available on channels which are universally available across the UK: Traveline, google maps, and a variety of open-source websites such as City mapper.

Slough Borough Council does not directly provide information on other bus services but instead directs users to Traveline and the websites of individual operators for details. For journey planning purposes most bus operators provide websites with service information. Provision of fares information is variable. Real-time information is generally available by app.

Transport for London provides bus stop flags at stops it serves. Slough Borough Council provides flags at other locations showing route number and direction, though coverage is not universal. For the most part, bus operators post their own timetable information at bus stops. Slough Borough Council has provided information at some stops where there is more than one bus operator's services or at other locations.

SBC operates a real-time passenger information system with displays at most busy stops. Most operators provide a data feed to this – the major exceptions being Redline Buses and Transport for London.

Current passenger information situation compared to National Bus Strategy aspiration:

- “All public transport information should be easy to access with everything passengers need to know at their fingertips” - the environment of different operators providing services results in presentation of information in a variety of formats and with different levels of information provided. This makes the bus product unclear to prospective or occasional passengers. Information on fares is particularly variable.
- Bus stops should show accurate information about the services stopping there - this provision is variable in Slough.
- “Every town, city and rural area should have easy to access, up to date maps, showing all local bus services” - this is not the case in Slough.

2.1.6. Bus Fleet

Much of the bus fleet in Slough is mid-life with an average age of 8 years:

- TFL route 81 (operated under contract by Metroline) - 16 Volvo double-decks dating from 2010.
- First in Berkshire operate a mixed fleet of 43 single-deck buses from its depot in Slough mostly post 2015 Euro VI emissions standard with six older buses retrofitted to Euro VI.
- Thames Valley Buses based in Bracknell operate 15 buses in the Slough area all meeting Euro VI.
- Carousel typically operate 11 buses into Slough either Euro VI or retrofit to achieve this standard.

Emission standards are for the most part Euro VI. There are currently no zero-emission buses operating in Slough.

Current situation compared to National Bus Strategy aspiration.

- A mixed fleet, albeit generally to a high emission standard, but no zero-emission buses in the fleets. NBS: Buses are a key part of delivery of net zero by 2050.

Figure 2-3: Buses operating services 12 and WP1



2.1.7. Bus Priority and Infrastructure

Bus priority in Slough is focused on the A4 Bath Road corridor which passes through the Borough in an east/west direction and carries the high-frequency bus services from Cippenham and the Town Centre towards Heathrow and Hounslow. This was supplemented in 2020 by additional provision funded under DFT's Emergency Active Travel Fund on an experimental basis. This was made permanent in 2022 on a peak hour-only basis. The A4 is a key strategic corridor for Slough and several schemes to improve the route for all road users are under consideration.

There is a limited provision of bus priority on radial routes and consideration will be given to expanding this in the future where justified and addressing the junctions between radial routes and the A4. Consideration is also being given to prioritising buses through urban traffic management systems.

Approximately 6km of bus lanes operate in Slough. Traffic congestion in Slough does not follow a typical peak/off peak pattern due to the variable commuting times, a high level of freight movements and the balance of traffic between the A4 and the M4. In line with Local Transport Note 1/24: Bus User Priority (LTN 1/24), the operating hours of bus lanes will be optimised to the times when they can have the most impact on journey times. A range of vehicle classes are permitted to use bus lanes which are enforced using ANPR cameras.

A modern bus station was opened in Slough in 2011 close to the rail station and formed a key interchange facility in the town centre. Unfortunately, in 2022 the bus station suffered serious fire damage. Bus services currently use on street stops adjoining the site. Consideration is being given to bus passenger requirements in the vicinity of the town centre and rail station pending a scheme to ensure facilities in this area meet the emerging needs of the town.

Most Slough residents live with a 5-minute walk of a bus stop provided by SBC. The provision and condition of bus stops and shelters is under a rolling review.

Current situation compared to National Bus Strategy aspiration:

- "Buses must have greater priority on urban roads" - this is the case on the busiest bus corridor in Slough with consideration given to expanding provision to other routes where justified.
- "Buses must be better integrated with other modes and each other" - the Slough Town Centre bus interchange is close to the rail station and retail areas. However temporary facilities are currently in use and a long-term solution for the interchange is being developed.

2.1.8. Local Transport Authority Staffing

Currently 1.5 staff are engaged in public transport operations and delivery, but all have a wide range of duties of which public transport is only one. To date they have been supplemented by specialist resource provided by AtkinsRéalis Ltd.

Current situation compared to National Bus Strategy aspiration.

- Limited officer capacity to engage with bus operators and to provide proactive policy and operational direction.

Figure 2-4: Bus lane on the A4 Bath Road



2.1.9. Views of Passengers and Stakeholders

Slough Borough Council undertook on-line consultation with existing bus users, non-users and with stakeholders. This survey concluded on 1 October 2021. With feedback obtained from 389 respondents (of whom 189 identified as bus users and 200 identified as non-users). The survey revealed that around 44% of bus users agreed that bus travel was reliable. The most frequently cited reason cited by non users is that buses are too expensive, followed by buses taking too long to reach respondents' destinations, and a preference to travel by other modes. Full details of this survey were provided in the 2021 BSIP.

SBC plans to undertake periodic surveys of bus passenger and non user attitudes to inform the delivery of this plan.

Figure 2-5: A First in Berkshire bus on route A4



2.1.10. Bus Service Outcomes

According to DfT bus statistics, there are on average just under 23 bus passenger journeys starting in Slough for every resident in Slough. This bus passenger trip-rate has been falling over recent years (SBBEB Figure 7-2). This rate is significantly higher than in neighbouring Berkshire authorities but lower than would be suggested by the level of zero-car ownership amongst households in Slough. This suggests that the bus passenger trip-rate could be expected to be around 100% greater at around 45 trips per year (SBBEB Figure 7-3).

There are several exogenous factors for this.

- There is a high level of congestion on Slough's highway network, though this appears to have fallen slightly in recent years (SBBEB section 8.2). There are two main causes. The first is a high level of both in-commuting and out-commuting. The in-commuting in particular takes place over a very wide geographical area, much of it to the Slough Trading Estate, some distance from the town centre (SBBEB section 4). It is therefore difficult for public transport to capture these trips at either trip origin or trip end.
- SBC is close to the M4 motorway, and experiences variable levels of congestion resulting from incidents on the motorway, which then affects the reliability of local bus services particularly along the A4.
- Slough town centre has lost a significant amount of retail activity over recent years and does not have strong leisure trip attractors.
- There is no university in the town - universities are associated with higher levels of bus usage.
- Slough has an ethnically highly diverse population, elements of which are understood to place a high value of the ownership and use of a car.

On the other hand, Slough has a relatively high bus mode share for journeys to work at 7.5% (SBBEB Figure 7-8). This reflects in part the influence of Heathrow Airport, which is a significant attractor of demand for out-commuting (SBBEB section 4). Here Slough Borough Council, working in conjunction with Heathrow Airport Ltd (HAL) and the bus operators, has over recent years expended some effort in tailoring bus services to meet shift start and finish times, while HAL has offered very low public transport fares for employees at the Airport and extensive financial support to bus services.

Analysis by Urban Transport Group suggests that at a mode share of 7.5% for journeys to work, the overall demand for bus travel could be expected to be roughly 50% higher. Hence journeys to work are strongly represented in the overall demand for bus travel which indicates some success in attracting work trips to buses but ties in with the narrative above on exogenous factors which suggests reasons for lower levels of bus usage for discretionary and education journeys.

Current situation summary

- Demand for journeys to work is high but overall demand is lower than would be expected for the socio-demographic characteristics of Slough.
- The influence of Heathrow Airport in particular means that the recovery of demand for bus travel will be strongly aligned to economic activity in and around the airport.
- The national trend towards leisure/shopping journeys is lower in Slough due to limited attractors.
- Figure 2-9 summarises the strengths and weaknesses associated with the bus network in Slough affecting the demand for bus travel.

Figure 2-6: Summary of factors affecting the demand for bus travel in Slough



2.2. LTA Financial Support for Bus Services

The financial support that Slough Borough Council currently provides is shown at Table 2-2.

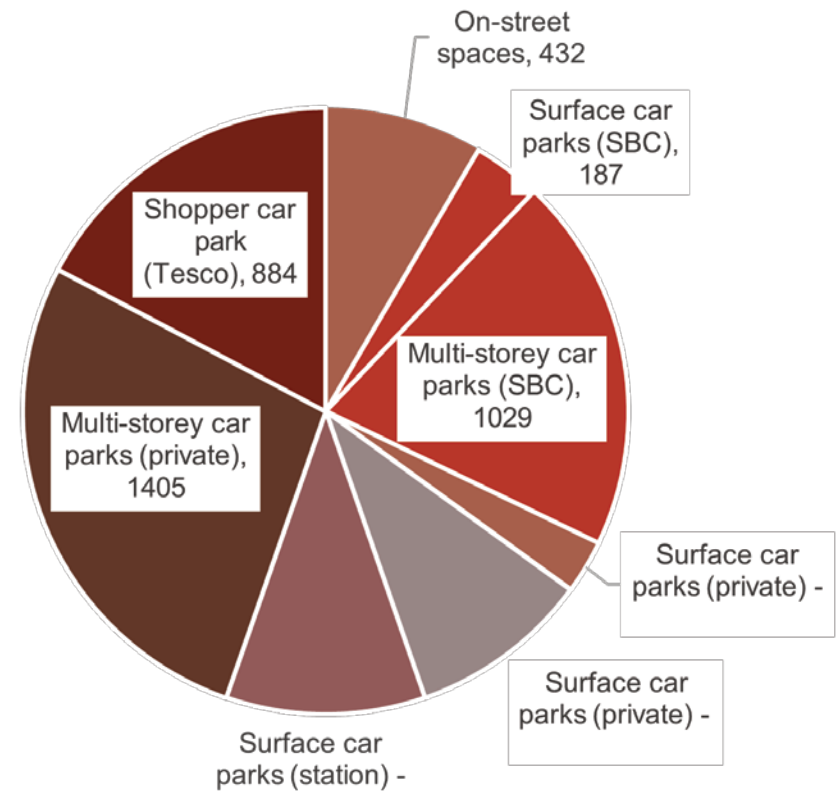
Table 2-2: Slough Borough Council financial support to bus services

Route	Description	Annual Value	Funding Source
12	Monday - Saturday one evening journey; Sunday daytimes	£26,412 (gross cost)	DfT Better Deal for Bus Users

Factors Influencing Bus Demand - Town Centre Parking

A previous assessment by Atkins suggested just over 5,000 parking spaces in Slough town centre. Figure 2-10 shows the breakdown between on-street and off-street and ownership types.

Figure 2-7: Slough town centre parking stock



Private operators have a large proportion of the parking stock with SBC-managed car parking (on-street and off-street combined) accounting for less than a third of the total. The Council has limited scope to use parking provision to influence modal choice.

The cost of bus travel is not generally competitive with car parking. In Slough, short stay parking costs are less than the £4 per passenger return journey by bus. Long stay parking costs are broadly in line with bus day tickets. In both cases parking a car containing 2 or more people would be considerably cheaper than if those people bought individual bus tickets.

Figure 2-8: A Carousel service 107 to Amersham



3. Improvements Programme to 2025

3.1. Network Enhancement

The first phase of the Council's Network Enhancement Programme will seek to enhance existing services as follows:

- Enhance early morning, evening, and Sunday routes within the Borough to enable more people to connect to onward bus links to get to/from work in the Heathrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow areas and Wexham Park Hospital.
- Enhance evening services enabling wider commuting and leisure travel between Slough and the nearby towns of Windsor, Beaconsfield, and High Wycombe.

The following service enhancements are therefore planned subject to funding:

- Increase the weekday daytime frequency of service 12/13 to half hourly.
- Enhance evening and Sunday services on routes 103/106 providing enhanced links between Slough and South Buckinghamshire (jointly with Bucks Council).
- Evening operation of service 3 providing links between Slough, Langley, and Uxbridge.

Contracts to secure these enhancements will be issued to the respective bus operators under the Council's standing orders. The outputs will be delivered in close consultation with Heathrow Airport Ltd, which funds bus services in the area, and with neighbouring authorities.

Funding will be set aside to provide information and marketing to encourage use of the enhanced services and the network.

3.2. Young People's Fares

The Council is seeking to standardise the conditions and discounts for young people's fares, explore the scope for multi operator fare products and ensure consistency of customer services through a passenger charter. The Council will seek to deliver standardisation of commercial terms through the Enhanced Partnership.

The Government-funded £3 maximum single fare is due to finish at the end of 2025. It is key that, in whatever follows that scheme, bus fares in Slough are in line with the wider region and set at a level which encourages more bus use.

3.3. Feasibility Studies

BSIP+ funding will be utilised to fund feasibility studies to advance the following initiatives set out in this BSIP:

- A programme of works and frequency enhancement on the A4 between West Slough and Heathrow to deliver a level of service equivalent to Bus Rapid Transit.
- Enhancement to facilitate improved interchange facilities in Slough Town Centre and the Rail Station
- Route studies to facilitate a "Marginal Gains for Buses" programme of low-cost high-impact highway interventions identified by bus drivers and passengers.
- Use of technology to maximise efficient use of road space for buses.

3.4. Capacity

Additional capacity is needed in Slough Borough Council to ensure delivery of this BSIP, and the associated programmes supported by Bus Service Improvement Plan funding.

4. Ambitions and Proposals for 2025-2030

Table 4-1: How we will deliver the National Bus Strategy in Slough.

National Bus Strategy Objective	Slough Ambition	What will be done	How it will be delivered
More frequent	To deliver a level of service equivalent to Bus Rapid Transit on the A4 between Slough and Heathrow.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrading the current 4 bus per hour service between Slough and Heathrow Central to 6 buses per hour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A joint programme delivered by SBC, Heathrow, and operators to deliver step changes in frequency, with enabling highway priority and on-street facilities.
Faster and more reliable	<p>To deliver faster, consistent bus journey times to a standard equivalent to Bus Rapid Transit on the A4 through the Borough.</p> <p>To mitigate the impact of traffic congestion on bus service punctuality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring the journey times for buses travelling along the A4 are faster than general traffic. A “Marginal Gains for Buses” programme of low-cost high-impact highway interventions identified by bus drivers and passengers. Use of technology to maximise efficient use of road space. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To maintain, develop and enhance existing bus priority facilities. To review each bus route to identify a range of smaller “marginal gain” interventions identified by bus drivers and passengers which would help buses run more reliably (for example, parking controls around bus stops, lane and junction layouts and minor road alignments). To develop technological solutions to reduce bus journey times (such as traffic signal priority). Integrate bus operational control with urban traffic management.
Cheaper	To ensure bus fares in Slough are comparable to those regionally with a maximum single bus fare and a standardised approach to young people’s fares.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure a uniform maximum single fare operates when the current national scheme ends. To ensure that all operators adopt a standard approach to fares for under 19s. To offer targeted incentives to encourage under 25s to use the bus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through our One Network Fares Programme in collaboration with bus operators in the Enhanced Partnership.

National Bus Strategy Objective	Slough Ambition	What will be done	How it will be delivered
More comprehensive	Provide a 7 days per week, 14 hours per day integrated bus service ensuring that passengers from all parts of the Borough can change buses in the town centre for onward travel to Wexham Park Hospital, Slough Trading Estate, Heathrow, Hounslow, and Windsor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The network will evolve towards an aspirational service level as set out in paragraph 4.3 of this Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A phased Bus Network Enhancement Plan will be established, increasing frequencies in anticipation of demand generated. Phase 2 to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> enhanced operation of local connecting services increased bus links between the Trading Estate and the town centre co-ordinated services between Slough and Windsor.
Easier to use, understand and better integrated with other modes	<p>Bus users and non-users can easily understand the bus service.</p> <p>Seamless connections between bus and rail in Slough Town Centre and connections between buses and trains at Burnham.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present a single bus network in Slough without inconsistencies between operating companies. Provide ticketing products which enable passengers to use different operator services without financial penalty. On and off bus payment to be simple and easy. Comprehensive digital and physical passenger information allowing passengers to track their bus in real time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Enhanced Partnership to adopt and introduce a Passenger Charter delivering consistency of service. Establish a multi operator ticketing scheme. Ensure contactless payment available on all buses in the Borough and early adoption of the national "Project Coral" contactless capping system for bus fares. Explore bus/rail ticketing opportunities with GBR and TfL.

National Bus Strategy Objective	Slough Ambition	What will be done	How it will be delivered
Safer, accessible, and inclusive by design	The highest standards of accessibility, safety and inclusivity will be accommodated in all new buses and infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All new buses to be fully accessible, compliant with all current safety standards, equipped with CCTV and providing a high standard of passenger comfort. • Ensure safe accessible bus stops and interchanges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced Partnership to agree a standard of bus design appropriate for the Slough community following engagement with groups representing all aspects of the town's community. • Audit bus stops and interchanges for accessibility and safety, implementing recommendations for improvement. • Adopt good practice in ensuring the bus network is a safe space for vulnerable members of the community. • Interchange improvement scheme in the Town Centre/Rail Station. • Locality interchange/mobility hub at Farnham Road.
Greener	All buses operating in the Borough to be zero emission ahead of the Council's deadline of 2040.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a target date beyond which all new buses would be zero emission. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participation in DfT ZEBRA and other initiatives to fund ZEBs. • Working closely with the EP, SBC to develop a business plan for investment in ZEBs.

The implementation of our ambitions for buses in Slough beyond 2025 is reliant upon funding being available. SBC will seek third party funding from developers, employers, and other generators of demand for bus travel.

Accountabilities and responsibilities for delivery of the measures proposed under this BSIP are set out in the Enhanced Partnership Plan. Many of the measures will require the agreement and active participation of the bus operators acting collectively through the Enhanced Partnership.

The provision of highway measures will sit with Slough Borough Council which will seek to co-ordinate these works with neighbouring highway authorities to deliver maximum effect across whole bus routes.

Key stakeholders will be consulted and informed and some – notably Heathrow Airport - will be closely involved in delivery of the measures proposed under the BSIP.

4.1. How We Will Evolve the Bus Network

Whilst the current bus network in the town broadly provides access to buses for most communities, increased frequencies and extended times of operation are needed to deliver a growth in bus use and modal shift. We have set out the aspirational service levels for the town in section 4.3. This section sets out the approach needed to achieve this.

We have found in recent years a willingness on the part of the main operators in Slough to consider minor changes to timetable proposals, in response to suggestions to better meet shift change times at major employers or to make headways more consistent. This follows the long-standing influence on the part of Heathrow Airport and Wexham Park Hospital to tailor services to the needs of their employees.

This collaborative process is established within the Enhanced Partnership enabling changes to the bus network in response to external influences, such as new developments both in the context of opportunities to grow demand but also to ensure that bus services can meet the mobility needs in an efficient and cost-effective way.

Heathrow Airport and the businesses adjacent to it are key workplaces for residents of Slough and it is crucial to ensure all parts of the Borough either enjoy a direct service or good connections to frequent services to the vicinity of the airport.

It is important for the bus network to adapt to changes in flexible working, shopping habits and leisure activities in Slough. Strengthened links and frequencies to and from the Farnham Road local centre are proposed to compliment the Destination Farnham Road Levelling Up funded regeneration scheme.

Links to the neighbouring towns of Windsor, Uxbridge, Bracknell, and High Wycombe are also important for Slough residents and businesses. We work with neighbouring authorities and organisations to develop bus services which cross Slough boundaries. Our immediate neighbours are Buckinghamshire Council, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Transport for London. Other authorities with an influence on bus service provision are Bracknell Forest Borough Council and Surrey County Council. We will also co-ordinate with them on highway schemes to benefit buses.

We will seek to ensure that service routeing remains stable and readily understood by residents - in particular, that buses follow consistent routeing throughout the day.

To the northwest of Slough, several areas are served by one bus route with frequent changes in direction. This results in lengthy journey times for some users, as noted by some respondents to the residents' survey. These areas are amongst the more deprived in Slough and we will work with the bus operator to develop quicker and more direct services for the benefit of these residents.

Within the Network Enhancement Plan, SBC and bus operators will prepare a short set of network planning guidelines to be adopted by the Enhanced Partnership to ensure the commercial network evolves in a form consistent with this Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Where additional funding is needed to advance the network, its deployment would be determined by the Network Enhancement Plan.

4.2. Our Aspirational Bus Service Levels

Subject to funding, our aspirations for the Slough bus network involve strengthening frequencies on established routes. We would undertake a phased Network Enhancement Plan to deliver the following.

- A level of service equivalent to Bus Rapid Transit on the A4 between West Slough and Heathrow at least every 10 minutes between 06:00 and 19:00 with maximum 20-minute headways at all other times.
- The shuttle service between the town centre and Wexham Park Hospital operating every 10 minutes with service operation before 08:00 and after 20:00 tailored to the needs of shift workers.
- Slough Trading Estate to be served both from the frequent services on the A4 Bath Road and a maximum 30-minute headway service within the Estate from 06:00 until 20:00.
- Links from Slough to employment areas at Colnbrook, Poyle, Harlington and Hounslow to operate at least every 30 minutes.
- In addition to the BRT level service, there shall be at least 2 buses per hour between central Slough and Heathrow between 00:00 and 03:00 and 3 buses per hour 03:00 until 06:00
- At least 4 buses per hour from 06:00 - 23:00 between the town centres of Slough Town and Windsor with at least 2 buses per hour during these times linking Slough with Maidenhead/Taplow, Uxbridge, Bracknell and High Wycombe.
- Direct bus links to Heathrow to be available from Cippenham, Britwell, Chalvey, Langley and Farnham Road.
- Connections from residential areas of Slough without a direct service to Heathrow will be provided in the town centre with a maximum connecting time of 15 minutes.

- All other bus routes to operate to a maximum 30-minute daytime headway with a maximum 60-minute headway after 19:00.
- Given the high level of use of buses by commuters to occupations involving shift work, the aspiration is for a uniform service level 7 days per week from 04:00 until 00:00. Service levels on Bank Holidays to be determined in consultation with major employers including Heathrow.

Figure 4-1: First in Berkshire service 7 bus



4.3. A Faster, More Reliable Bus Service

To deliver a level of service equivalent to Bus Rapid Transit on the A4 between Slough and Heathrow it will be necessary to ensure the journey times for buses travelling along the A4 are faster than general traffic. Current bus priority provisions on the route will be optimised and expanded where necessary to achieve this objective in line with DfT guidance LTN1/24.

Elsewhere in the town, it is planned to deliver targeted interventions at the points where delays are experienced. We will do this through our “Marginal Gains for Buses” programme of low cost/high impact highway interventions identified by bus drivers and passengers. These could include minor physical works such as adjusting or removing bus laybys, changes to refuge islands and other pinch points, together with alterations to lines and signage. It will also review TROs, parking and loading controls at and around bus stops. Subject to funding, we propose to commit to a rolling programme of reviewing 3 bus routes a year under the Enhanced Partnership, focusing on the busiest routes first.

Given its proximity to Heathrow and the motorways, together with a high level of logistics and manufacturing industry, there are many competing demands on road space in Slough. Incidents on the M4 or M25 can also displace traffic leading to congestion in the town. It will be key to ensure the use of technology to maximise efficient use of road space including traffic signal priority for buses.

We recognise that there are operational actions, which would deliver a more stable bus service. We propose to:

- Review the process of communicating roadworks with operators, with the aim of enabling better planning and communication of diversions.
- Give bus operations control staff access to traffic cameras such that bus service controllers can identify incidents emerging in real-time and take early appropriate action.
- Review bus schedules using AI tools to ensure they more accurately reflect real life traffic conditions.

Figure 4-2: Route 703 bus to Bracknell in Colnbrook



4.4. An Affordable, Easy-to-Use Bus Service

Section 2 illustrated that, whilst single fares are currently capped at £2, passengers purchasing day and season tickets in Slough pay more than those in similar towns in the region. Subject to funding, a capped maximum single fare would continue to operate for journeys starting or ending in Slough.

Working through the Enhanced Partnership, the cost of day and period tickets would become broadly comparable with those in the wider region.

Slough has a younger than average population and it is crucial to encourage bus use from an early age. It is proposed to standardise the conditions and discounts available to younger passengers throughout the Borough and to provide targeted discounts for young adults under 25.

Currently passengers making multi leg journeys using more than one operator's services are disadvantaged by having to pay more than one fare; this is particularly the case for travel to Wexham Park Hospital. It is proposed to introduce multi-operator ticketing products. Initially this will take the form of QR tickets sold on the bus and through operator apps. The Enhanced Partnership will oversee an agreed approach to revenue distribution.

All operators are now able to accept contactless payment on bus and some operators are offering a capped "tap on tap off" facility limited to their own services. Ideally this facility would be available for any journey in Slough. It is intended that the universal approach being developed by the Government's Project Coral initiative will operate in Slough.

Passengers need reliable information to help plan journeys and accurate live information during their journeys. This requires a mix of physical and digital information provided by operators, the Council and third-party providers such as Google and Citymapper. Particular attention will be given to ensuring information at bus stops and interchanges is clear and up to date. Consideration is being given to the use of "e ink" displays at bus stops, subject to funding.

A uniform branding is not considered necessary in Slough given that most services start or end in neighbouring areas. It will however be important to ensure all services are represented on passenger facing maps and other information material regardless of the bus operator providing them.

The Enhanced Partnership will develop a passenger charter in conjunction which will include commitments around:

- Ensuring that passengers can find out about their journeys in an impartial manner.
- Ensuring that accurate bus service information will be provided at bus stops.
- Ensuring that buses are clean and conform to an agreed specification for that service.
- Ensuring suitable redress for when things go wrong, including provision of a taxi if the last bus on a route is cancelled.
- Regular reporting of key bus service performance metrics, such as reliability.

4.5. A Bus Service Integrated with Other Modes

Slough enjoys good frequent rail links to London, Reading and other destinations in the South East. This has been strengthened by the opening of the Elizabeth Line. Linking bus passengers to Slough Rail Station for onward travel is key. There is also potential to promote the bus service to inbound rail passengers travelling to the Trading Estate and other destinations in the town.

We will ensure good interchange facilities are incorporated into a mobility hub adjacent to the rail station, together with high quality wayfinding and live passenger information. This will require a scheme to replace the current temporary facilities provided following the bus station fire.

We will liaise with TfL Rail, Great British Rail and Great Western Railway on timetable co-ordination and bus/rail ticketing, including the promotion of Plus Bus for business travellers and other visitors to Slough.

Burnham Station on the Elizabeth Line is located close to the Trading Estate and, subject to funding, it is proposed to enhance co-ordinated bus links in the vicinity to support public transport access in the area. We will also seek opportunities to improve timetable co-ordination between bus and rail services at Langley station.

No DRT services currently operate in Slough and this Plan has not identified a demand for which this would be an appropriate solution. However, some employers may require bespoke transport for its employees for which DRT may offer a solution. We therefore propose to work with major employers to support the development of bus-based travel to work or education.

Figure 4-3: Thames Valley bus on service 5 to Heathrow



4.6. A Safe and Inclusive Bus Service

We will ensure that all new buses provide standards of safety and comfort that meets the needs of all passengers. Working through the Enhanced Partnership we will set a standard of bus design appropriate for the Slough community following engagement with groups representing all aspects of the town's community.

Our community engagement will also identify actions to ensure the bus network is a safe space for vulnerable members of the community and we will adopt standards and initiatives that have proven to work in other areas.

Passengers advise that they feel most vulnerable when waiting for the bus. We will audit bus stops and interchanges for accessibility and safety, implementing recommendations for improvement with a rolling programme of works.

4.7. A Clean and Carbon-Neutral Bus Service

Within Slough there are four Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) with bus corridors passing through each of them. We will work with bus operators towards the aim that all buses operating through AQMAs meet the Euro VI standard for diesel emissions.

The Council has established its Carbon Management Plan, which sets the objective for Slough Borough Council operations to be carbon neutral by 2030. We also hope to lay the foundations for a carbon neutral bus service during this timescale and we will seek funding opportunities to deliver a migration to zero-emission bus fleet with associated infrastructure over the coming years.

The first stage of this will be to agree with bus operators, through the Enhanced Partnership, a target date beyond which all new buses would be zero emission.

We will co-ordinate this activity with neighbouring authorities especially Transport for London, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Buckinghamshire Council in recognition of the fact that most bus services cross the Slough boundary.

5. Targets, Performance Monitoring and Reporting

We will set and monitor against the following:

- **9% reduction in AM peak bus journey times by 2030** - measured on a sample of routes, controlled against car journey times.
- **87% of buses operating on time by 2030** - measured using the DfT methodology, this represents a 10% improvement on the 79% recorded in 2018.
- **20% increase in bus passenger use by 2030** - over a baseline of 2022/23, measured by the DfT methodology using figures provided by operators.
- **improving passenger satisfaction and perceptions** - using results of a rolling survey administered by SBC.

The reporting will also summarise changes made to the bus product such as the implementation of bus lanes, service development and fare changes.

The target setting and reporting process will be overseen by the Enhanced Partnership Board which will review performance and update targets as necessary.

5.1. Bus Journey Times

We estimate that the average one-way bus journey time in the AM peak 1, weighted by bus service frequency, is 24 minutes within the Slough boundary. We estimate an average journey time saving, again weighted by frequency, of just over 2 minutes, or a 9% reduction, as a result of implementation of bus priority and other traffic management measures described in section 2. This estimate is at present a very high level one.

In addition, work undertaken by Atkins in 2019 estimated a reduction in journey time of 2% resulting from a conversion of 50% of on-bus fare-paying transactions to Tap on Tap Out (TOTO). Adding this gives a total journey time reduction of 2.5 minutes or 11%.

We will review the target as design work on bus priority and traffic management measures proceed, and as SBC gains a more in-depth understanding of the scope for journey time improvements.

5.2. Bus Reliability

DfT bus statistics give a figure of 79% 'on-time' performance in Slough for the latest year for which data are available, 2017/18 ('on time' is defined as between 1.00 minute early and 5.59 minutes late). Traffic congestion is a significant factor in Slough and bus performance can be impacted when displaced traffic avoiding incidents on the M4 use the Borough's Road network. A pragmatic approach is therefore needed in such a busy area.

We propose to implement a target of a 10% improvement in reliability to be achieved by 2030. This will aim for an improvement from 79% to 87% of buses departing 'on time' at all timing points within the Slough boundary.

There are currently no high frequency services to be measured using the 'Excess Wait Time' (EWT) formula, however, this Plan states the intention that services on the A4 would be enhanced to this standard. TfL monitor service 81 in this manner and a target for any services meeting the definition of high frequency would move from the 1.1 minutes minimum standard of Excess Wait Time currently applied to route 81 to 1.0 minutes.

5.3. Passenger Use

The development of the target increases in patronage resulting from measures implemented under the BSIP is summarised at Figure 3-1 below. These are structured according to elements of Generalised Cost, which is a helpful framework in which to consider the changes to a passenger's journey from walking to a bus stop, waiting for a bus, paying a fare, travelling on a bus, and experiencing 'soft' measures like real-time passenger information and on-bus audio announcements.

We have used standard elasticities in this assessment. Given the high propensity to use buses in Slough for work and school education journeys, we think the demand response to reliability measures may be greater than estimated. Patronage recovered in 2022/23 to 78% of pre pandemic 2019/20 levels in line with experience elsewhere. It is intended to use 2022/23 as the new baseline from which passenger growth can be measured. It is proposed to seek a 20% uplift in patronage by 2029/30 from a baseline of 3.6 million pa recorded in 2022/23. This provides for a trendline as below.

Figure 5-1: Patronage growth trajectory (million passengers per annum)

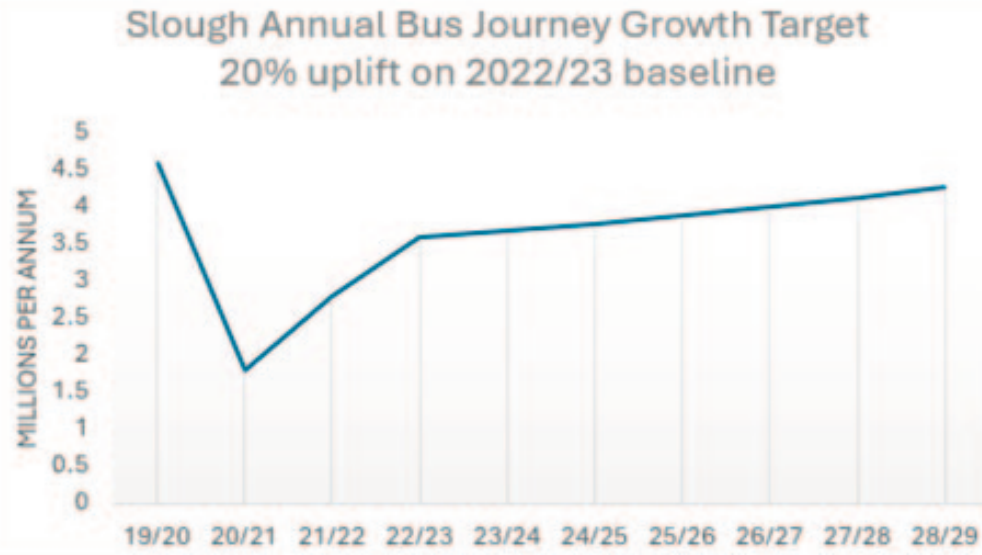


Table 5-1: Target development

Generalised Cost Element	Change	Elasticity Factor ²	Target % Change	% Passengers the Change Applies to	Forecast Demand Response
Scheduled wait time	Headway	-0.25	-33%	25%	2.1%
Journey time variability	'On Time' or EWT performance	-0.25	-10%	100%	2.5%
Walk	Service Density	-0.25	0%	0%	0%
In-Vehicle Time	On-bus journey time	-0.60	-11%	100%	6.7%
Fare	Average fare/paid passenger journey	-0.30	-20%	50%	3.0%
Real-Time Information	Number of passengers who receive RTPI while waiting at a bus stop	-0.25	-2%	33%	0.4%
Simplified Ticketing	Number of passengers who benefit from simplified ticketing	-1.1	-2%	50%	0.8%
On-bus audio announcements	Number of passengers who benefit from simplified ticketing	-0.6	-2%	61%	1.5%
Target	Overall	N/A	N/A	N/A	17.0%

5.4. Passenger Satisfaction and Perceptions

Slough Borough Council has not been the subject of the regular 'Bus Passenger Survey' designed and administered by Transport Focus. There is therefore limited information available on the baseline. We have asked bus operators to provide information on customer comments and complaints which could form a baseline, and in terms of establishing a target or monitoring, could be used in future years. If this proves feasible, we will control this against patronage to provide a complaints or comments rate per 100,000 journeys.

In preparation of the 2021 BSIP, we undertook an online survey of users and non-users, the headline results of which have been reported in Section 2. This has requested, amongst other things, residents' views on the perceptions of the bus service. We intend to repeat this survey to inform revisions to the BSIP, and so this will also provide an evidence base, which we can use to monitor the trend on satisfaction as well as gain intelligence on how the perceptions of users and non-users change.

5.5. Monitoring and Reporting

The following data sources and techniques will be used in monitoring against the targets.

- Analysis of bus scheduled journey times within the Slough boundary.
- Analysis of real-time data from bus operators, both including and excluding bus stop dwell times.
- Comparing bus journey times with data sources for car journey times on the same corridors.
- We will monitor the patronage target using data collated from the bus operators in Slough, using passenger boardings in Slough to be consistent with the DfT's bus statistics.
- Passenger satisfaction will be monitored using a periodic repeat of the 2021 survey to measure changes in passenger sentiment.

The Enhanced Partnership will publish performance against our four key targets annually on the council website

6. Overview Tables

Table 6-1: Programme to 2025

Scheme category	Title of scheme/measure	Budget/est. cost (£k)			of which BSIP funding (£k)		
		Capital	Revenue	Total	Capital	Revenue	Total
Bus service support	Bus Network Enhancement Plan Phase 1	0	250,000	250,000	0	250,000	250,000
Other	Promoting the Network	0	25,000	25,000	0	25,000	25,000
Other	Capacity and capability to deliver the BSIP	0	131,534	131,534	0	131,534	131,534
Other	Feasibility Studies to deliver BSIP	0	280,000	280,000	0	280,000	280,000

Table 6-2: Ambitions and proposals for 2025 and beyond

NBS objective	Title of scheme or proposal	Additional description
Service level and network coverage	A4 Bus Rapid Transit Programme	Uplift service levels and frequencies
Service level and network coverage	Bus Network Enhancement Plan - phase 1	Maintain current BSIP funding
Service level and network coverage	Bus Network Enhancement Plan - phase 2	Uplift in frequencies and temporal coverage
Service level and network coverage	Bus Network Enhancement Plan - phase 3	Uplift in frequencies and temporal coverage
Bus priority	A4 Bus Performance	Enhancements to facilitate Bus Rapid Transit
Bus priority	Marginal Gains Programme	Delay and boarding time hotspots
Bus priority	Traffic Signal Bus Priority Programme	Infrastructure and technology
Lower and simpler fares	One Network Fares Programme Phase 1	Maintain fare cap and multi operator scheme
Ticketing	One Network Fares Programme Phase 2	Implement Project Coral contactless capping
Waiting and interchange facilities	Slough Town Centre Interchange	Waiting facilities and wayfinding
Waiting and interchange facilities	Farnham Road Interchange	Waiting facilities and wayfinding
Waiting and interchange facilities	Bus Stop improvement programme	Safety and accessibility improvements
Bus information and network identity	Bus Stop Information Project	
Bus fleet	Zero Emission Bus Programme	Assume Zebra contribution to fund upgrade of remainder of the fleet to ZEB (2023 prices)

Name of authority or authorities:	Slough Borough Council
Franchising or Enhanced Partnership (or both):	Enhanced Partnership
Date of publication:	01 October 2024
Date of next annual update:	01 October 2025
URL of published report:	National Bus Strategy/Bus Back Better - Slough Borough Council

National Bus Strategy: Bus Service Improvement Plan - September 2024