



Warrington's Bus Service Improvement Plan

Annual Update 2022



WARRINGTON
Borough Council

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Foreword

I am delighted to present Warrington's annual update of our Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

We are very pleased to have been indicatively awarded £16.2m, up to the end of March 2025 for the enhancements identified within our BSIP submission; we continue to work collaboratively with all of our bus operators in Warrington, as well as the Department for Transport (DfT), to develop a variation to our Enhanced Partnership and start to draw this funding down. The £16.2m will enable us to give much greater priority to bus services on our busiest A49 Winwick Road corridor, introduce new services and improve the frequency of others and introduce a capped single fare of £2 for adults and £1 for juniors, providing improved access for all. These measures will give our residents, businesses and visitors increased opportunity to get around by bus during a time in our lives where the cost of living is such a massive challenge.

In the meantime, in order to inform how best to target our proposed BSIP improvements, we utilised the Local Transport Fund (LTF) from DfT to introduce a Super Summer Service from the middle of July. This included enhanced evening services and cheaper fares on a number of routes, as well as enabling concessionary pass holders to travel free before 9:30am on weekdays, all of this designed to stimulate use of the bus network. The results of this pilot, have been very pleasing, with almost 60% increases in the use of evening bus services in some weeks and an overall increase in the number of bus journeys being made across our borough.

In parallel with this I have been delighted with the progress in building a new bus depot for Warrington's Own Buses (WOB) who operate the majority of bus services in Warrington and that this will be the first purpose built all electric bus depot with confirmation of Warrington's successful bid for Zero Emission Buses Regional Areas (ZEBRA) funding which will see WOB's entire fleet replaced with electric buses by late 2023.

I personally look forward to continuing to work together with operators and officers in making Warrington's bus network the best it possibly can be.

Councillor Hans Mundry

Cabinet Member

Highways, Transportation and Public Realm



1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

Warrington's first Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) was published in October 2021¹; this detailed how Warrington Borough Council (WBC) intends to transform bus services, infrastructure and integration within the borough, and in the process drive growth in bus patronage. The BSIP included a request to Department for Transport (DfT) for additional funding to deliver the strategy.

Subsequent to the submission of the BSIP, and as required as part of the National Bus Strategy², WBC has been working with operators in the borough to establish an Enhanced Partnership (EP) (see further detail in **section 2**). The EP Plan provides a high-level vision and objectives for bus services in the local area, drawing on Warrington's BSIP, and is supported by an EP Scheme, which contains the detail of what is to be delivered.

In April 2022, the Department for Transport (DfT) notified Warrington Borough Council of an indicative allocation of up to £16.2m (of which £9.9m is capital and £6.3m is revenue) as contribution to deliver on the initiatives set out in the BSIP. However, this was not at that stage a formal or binding grant offer and funding confirmation was conditional on submission and implementation of a transformational EP, which included firmer and more detailed commitments from WBC and local bus operators, to deliver a package of prioritised and ambitious improvements to bus services.

Whilst in discussions with DfT to agree the core components relating to the BSIP funding ask, an initial EP Scheme was made on 1st July 2022. This was jointly developed by WBC and operators in Warrington following a formal consultation process with operators and a statutory consultation process with wider stakeholders. It sets out obligations and requirements on WBC, as both the Local Transport Authority (LTA) and the Local Highway Authority (LHA), and on operators, in order to achieve the intended improvements, with the aim of delivering the objectives of the associated EP Plan.

In August 2022 the DfT confirmed the aforementioned funding allocation, but advised that this is conditional on an EP Scheme variation being made which is currently being worked up by council officers in liaison with operators to reflect the additional initiatives enabled through BSIP funding and this is intended to be completed in the next few months.

In the meantime, WBC is required to update the BSIP on an annual basis. At this stage, WBC considers that the problems and opportunities identified in the original BSIP remain current and as such, a full update has not been undertaken with this document summarising the progress made in the first year of Warrington's BSIP.

¹ www.warrington.gov.uk/buses

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/980227/DfT-Bus-Back-Better-national-bus-strategy-for-England.pdf

1.2 Structure

Following the introduction, this report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2 - Progress with BSIP:** sets out the key activity undertaken in getting an initial EP Plan and Scheme agreed, and the progress made in defining the core elements of the strategy, covering in particular bus priority infrastructure, network development and fares.
- **Section 3 – Progress with other Schemes:** provides a summary of progress made in a number of key complementary schemes, including a new all-electric bus depot for Warrington’s Own Buses (WOB) which will be fitted out with charging facilities for a new low-emission fleet funded through a successful Zero Emission Buses Regional Areas (ZEBRA) funding bid, details of a bus stop infrastructure upgrade programme and a Summer fare initiative, which is seen as a precursor to a national initiative in January to March 2023 and a subsequent local scheme.
- **Section 4 – Next Steps:** sets out the key next steps in producing and agreeing a variation to the EP Scheme, which is vital to securing DfT BSIP funding, taking forward the bus priority proposals and setting out the approach to ongoing monitoring/updates.

2. Progress with BSIP

Following publication of our first BSIP on 29th October 2021, we entered into discussions with DfT about our BSIP proposals and whether funding might be provided towards them. These discussions resulted in a number of changes being made to the proposals, including extension of the bus priority proposals from the A49 Triangle (A49 Winwick Road, Pinnars Brow, Winwick Road) to potentially also cover the A49 southbound from the A50 junction, as well as the provision of greater clarity on our proposed network development expenditure. These changes are discussed further below.

Following our discussions with DfT, we were pleased to receive notification on 4th April 2022 that we had been awarded an indicative funding allocation of up to £16,198,420 for the period from 2022/23 to 2024/25 financial years, of which £9,898,000 was allocated for capital expenditure and £6,300,420 was allocated for revenue expenditure. After further provision of information to DfT to clarify our proposals, the indicative funding was confirmed on 8th August 2022, broken down between the following areas of expenditure:

- Bus priority infrastructure: £9,898,000
- Network development: £4,150,420
- Fare capping: £2,000,000
- Marketing and administrative support: £150,000

2.1 Bus Priority Infrastructure

Our original bus priority infrastructure proposals were set out in section 4.1 of the 2021/22 BSIP, and can be summarised as follows:

- Commence delivery of bus priority measures in the A49 Triangle and delivery of the Town Deal proposals for improved bus priority on the A49 Wilderspool Causeway. Develop a programme for delivery of other bus priority proposals in subsequent years. Develop a Punctuality Improvement Plan in partnership with bus operators.

We discussed these proposals with bus operators, who indicated that an increased level of bus priority on the A49 Winwick Road southbound carriageway could allow them to potentially reinvest in network improvements and/or fare reductions. Therefore, we have extended our proposals to cover bus priority infrastructure in a southbound direction on Winwick Road between the A50 Long Lane / Northway junction and Winwick Street, currently estimated at approximately 1.6km of bus lane, linked with junction improvements and a supporting Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) strategy covering traffic signals, as well as improvements to walking and cycling provision over the full route.

WBC has agreed to provide up to £1.5m in match funding to support these proposals, which are summarised in Table 2.1 to Table 2.5 overleaf. As set out in **section 4**, the proposals are now subject to more detailed design work and may therefore be subject to change.

Table 2.1: New Bus Lanes

| Location | Operational Hours | Vehicles Permitted | From | To | Length |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|
| A49 Winwick Road (Southbound) | 24 hours | Bus / Cycle / Taxi | Northway | Jubilee Way | 475m |
| A49 Winwick Road (Southbound) | 24 hours | Bus / Cycle / Taxi | Jubilee Way | Longford Street | 549m |
| A49 Winwick Road (Southbound) | 24 hours | Bus / Cycle / Taxi | Longford Street | Melville Close | 262m |
| A49 Winwick Road (Southbound) | 24 hours | Bus / Cycle / Taxi | A49 Triangle bus gate | Roundabout of: Winwick Road / Pinnars Brow / Winwick Street | 210m |

Table 2.2: New Bus Gates

| Location | Operational Hours | Vehicles Permitted |
|--|-------------------|--------------------|
| Junction of: Alder Lane / A49 Winwick Road, permitting access to the A49 Winwick Road (Southbound) | 24 hours | Bus / Cycle |
| A49 Winwick Road / Tesco / Halliwell Jones Stadium junction permitting southbound access via a bus gate to the junction to allow buses to avoid the Pinnars Brow junction (to complement the existing bus gate for use by buses travelling northbound) | 24 hours | Bus / Cycle |

Table 2.3: Active Travel Elements

| Location | Type | From | To | Length |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|--------|
| A49 Winwick Road (Southbound) | Shared use | Long Lane | Between Collegiate Road & Jubilee Way | 219m |
| A49 Winwick Road (Southbound) | Bi-directional cycle track | Between Collegiate Road & Jubilee Way | Jockey Street | 595m |
| A49 Winwick Road (Southbound) | Shared use | Jockey Street | Longford Street | 96m |
| A49 Winwick Road (Southbound) | Bi-directional cycle track | Longford Street | Bluecoat Street | 332m |
| A49 Winwick Road (Southbound) | Shared use | Bluecoat Street | Silver Street | 189m |
| Winwick Road | Bi-directional cycle track | Silver Street | Junction of: Tanners Lane / Haydock Street / Winwick Street | 148m |

Table 2.4: Traffic Signal Upgrades

| Location |
|--|
| Junction of A50 Long Lane / A49 Winwick Road |
| Junction of A49 Winwick Road / Jubilee Way |
| Junction of A49 Winwick Road / Kerfoot Street / A574 Longford Street |
| A49 Triangle |

Table 2.5: Crossing Upgrades

| Existing Type | Proposed Type | Location |
|---------------|----------------------------|--|
| Toucan | Toucan | A49 Winwick Road, crossing from Collegiate Road to shopping park |
| Toucan | Toucan | A49 Winwick Road, crossing from Corbet Street to shopping park |
| Puffin | Puffin (with bus priority) | A49 Winwick Road, crossing from Melville Close to Tesco Extra |

2.2 Network Development

Our original network development proposals were also set out in section 4.1 of the 2021/22 BSIP, and can be summarised as follows:

- Improvements in evening and weekend service levels and rural Monday to Saturday daytime services, strengthened cross-boundary service provision and more attractive links to key trip attractors. A network review process that identifies current and future gaps in the network. A maximum number of service change dates per year.

We discussed these proposals with DfT, who requested clarification on how the funding was to be allocated. In response to this request, we confirmed that allocation of funding would be prioritised using WBC's established tendered service prioritisation matrix, which ranks proposals on the basis of the following criteria:

- Maintaining a core strategic public transport network, linking key residential areas of the borough with employment sites and key local services;
- Supporting public transport services which enable disadvantaged groups and communities to access employment sites and key local services;
- Reducing emissions in our Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs);
- Integrating with other public transport services;
- Availability of alternative public transport services;
- Access for disabled persons or those with limited mobility;
- Degree of rurality;
- Subsidy per passenger;
- Availability of funding;
- Extension of otherwise commercial services; and
- Patronage trends.

The nature of the network development proposals will be developed over the coming months, with discussions already taking place with bus operators and neighbouring authorities.

2.3 Fares

Our original proposals for fares were set out in section 4.3 of the 2021/22 BSIP, and can be summarised as follows:

- Determine steps required for all services to accept contactless payments and work with bus operators to pilot fare reductions and improvements in fare simplicity.

These proposals are being further developed, with the intention of introducing a maximum £2 adult single fare at the earliest opportunity. The Government has now announced a national fare capping scheme that also proposes capping adult single fares at £2, which is expected to run from January to March 2023. Therefore, it is now our intention to introduce a local fare capping scheme to coincide with the end of the national scheme and for this to be in place until at least the end of March 2025.

Although not currently funded, we will also examine the feasibility of extending pre-existing child fare concessions to those aged 16-18 (inclusive).

2.4 Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme

In order to qualify for BSIP funding, each LTA is required to decide whether they are to use an Enhanced Partnership (EP) or a franchise to deliver their proposals. While WBC continues to keep an open mind concerning the benefits of franchising and may choose to adopt this approach in the future, an initial decision has been taken to follow the EP delivery mechanism. To this end, an EP Plan and EP Scheme were published on 1st July 2022, with the EP Scheme setting out the following commitments:

WBC shall...

- Continue to provide and maintain existing bus priority measures and the Warrington Bus Interchange;
- Maintain a budget for expenditure on socially necessary services at 2021/22 levels for three years from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025;
- Maintain a budget for reimbursement of concessionary travel which is sufficient to adhere to scheme requirements, for three years from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025; and
- Continue to carry out activities relating to Warrington Bus Interchange management, bus stop management, planned events and utility works management, highway scheme development, obtaining and overseeing developer contributions towards bus improvements, network planning and bus service procurement, concessionary travel reimbursement and publicising timetable information.

Bus operators shall...

- Provide information to WBC in a specified format when registering, varying or cancelling a bus service;
- Maintain a website that provides information on current timetables;
- Provide a link to the websites of other bus operators in the area; and
- By 1 July 2023, only be permitted to change timetables on three specified dates each year, as well as over the Christmas period.

We are now seeking to increase the obligations on WBC and bus operators to take into account the BSIP funding award. These increased obligations are discussed in **section 4**.

3. Progress with other schemes

This section provides an update on a number of complementary schemes that whilst not funded directly through BSIP funding, are consistent with the stated objectives of the BSIP, the council’s Local Transport Plan 4 and the wider English National Bus Strategy – ‘Bus Back Better’.

3.1 Warrington Zero Emission Bus Regional Area and New Warrington’s Own Buses ‘All Electric’ Depot



In April 2021, DfT invited all LTAs in England outside London to submit expressions of interest in receiving funding to become a Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA). As established, the ZEBRA scheme offered up to £120m for LTAs to support the introduction of zero-emission buses and the infrastructure required to support them.³

Subsequently, WBC submitted an expression of interest via a fast track process and, in late June 2021, was selected along with five other shortlisted authorities to progress to Phase 2 of the competition. A further 17 authorities were selected under the standard process, which had a longer schedule for delivery. Authorities invited to Phase 2 of the ZEBRA scheme were required to develop and submit by August 2021 full business cases for investment and, in October 2021, it was announced that our bid had been successful.

Warrington’s ZEBRA bid will see the entire Warrington’s Own Buses fleet of diesel buses replaced by new, state of the art, electric buses which makes up around 85% of all bus mileage operated across the town. As new vehicles, the buses will be accessible and adhere to equalities legislation, and they will meet the Enhanced Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations 2000.

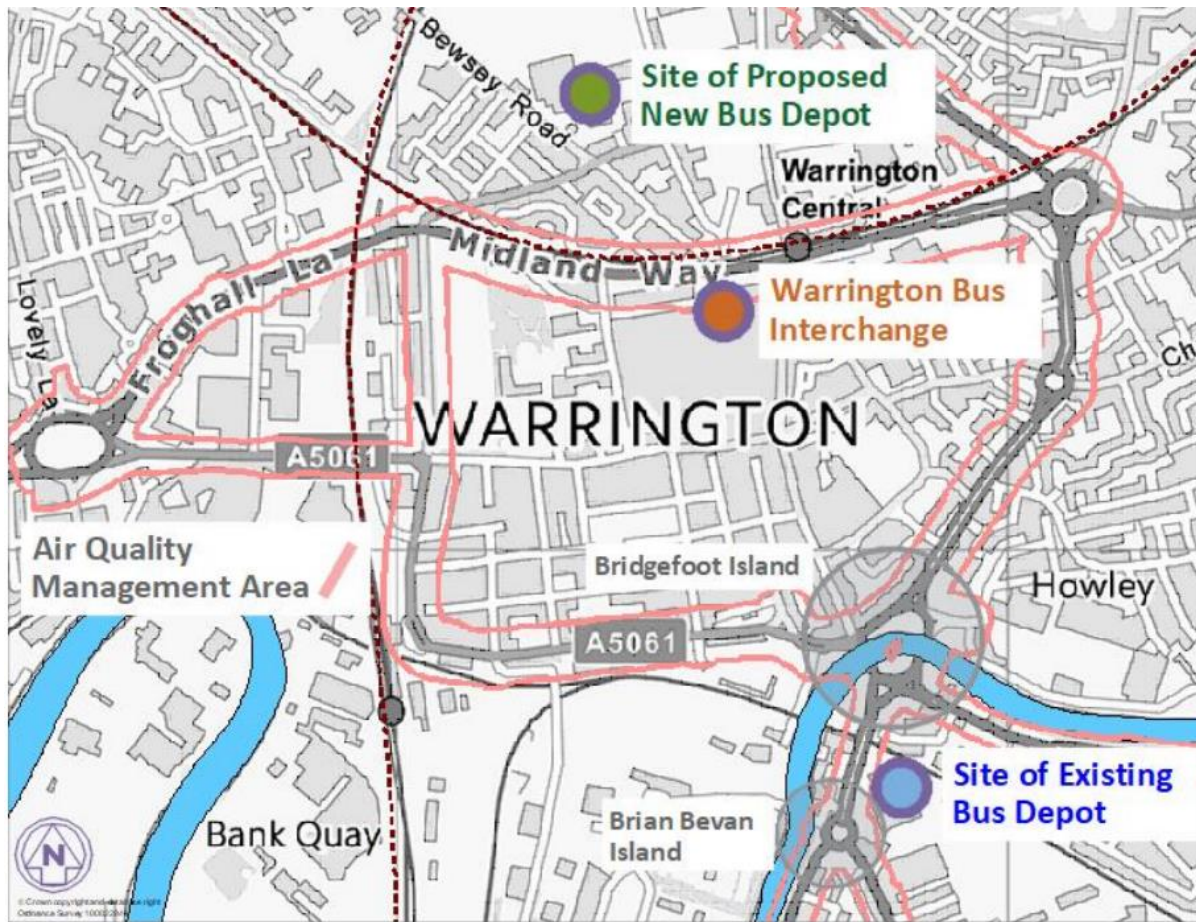
The funding will see the full Warrington’s Own Buses (WOB) fleet converted to battery-electric operation by February 2024, with the fleet charged overnight when services are not operating. Our remaining operators were approached to participate in the ZEBRA scheme, but declined the opportunity at that time. However, we remain very committed for all bus services in Warrington to be operated with zero emission buses and we will continue to liaise with these operators to explore the opportunities to decarbonise their services and seek to determine the trajectory towards full zero-emission operation.

The ZEBRA bid complements funding secured from Government through the Town Deal and the Getting Building Fund, which will be used for delivery of new bus priority measures (A49 Wilderspool Causeway) and a new bus depot. The new bus depot, which is now at an advanced stage of construction and due for completion in early 2023 is located on Dallam Lane (see **Figure 3.1**) and will be used by WOB following relocation from their existing site on Wilderspool Causeway, potentially enabling up to 600 new homes to be constructed on the existing depot site.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-zero-emission-bus-funding>

The depot has been designed to allow for the inclusion of charging points for electric buses, with green energy to be used from WBC's solar farm in Cirencester with the charging infrastructure to be installed by summer 2023 to allow the new buses to be delivered in the second half of 2023 through to early 2024.

Figure 3.1: Warrington New Bus Depot Location (in the context of current infrastructure and the Air Quality Management Area)



Source: Warrington ZEBRA Scheme Application Form, May 2021

Construction of the depot commenced in December 2021 and **Figure 3.2** shows some photos of the site under construction.

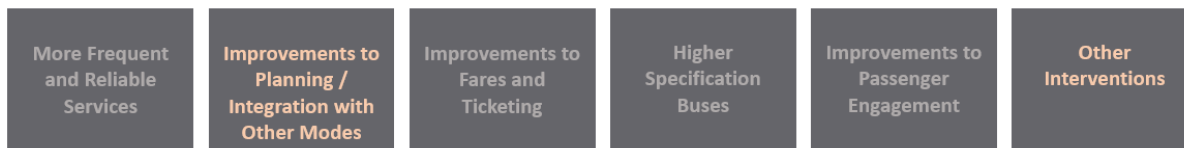
Figure 3.2: New Warrington All Electric Bus Depot (September 2022)



Source: WBC

The investment provided through the ZEBRA award will significantly enhance Warrington's bus fleet, providing air quality benefits with associated health benefits and contributing to carbon reduction. It is hoped that the scheme will increase bus use and reduce car dependency, whilst also reducing operating costs.

3.2 Bus Shelter Upgrades



Following a recent retender process for bus shelter provision across the borough, WBC has been working with the appointed supplier (Alight Media) to roll out a programme of bus stop upgrades. This will see 210 shelters replaced over a period of 6 months with highly visible mid-rails and perch seating. Of the 210 shelters, 141 will be advertising shelters (51 digital) and will be revenue generating to the Council, which will help to support the delivery of Warrington’s BSIP. WBC will have reserved space for community and social advertising, which could include bus-related promotions relevant to increased marketing activity.

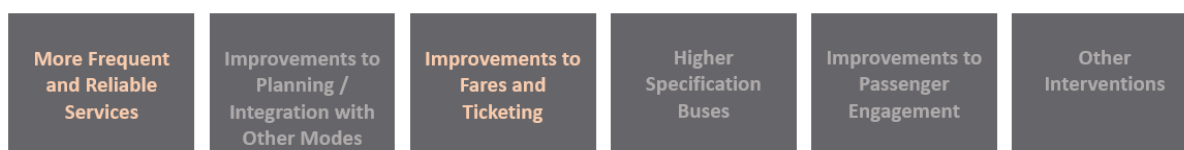
The agreed contract includes a showcase wind / solar powered shelter, to be located in a prominent position on the A49 Winwick Road, as well as a further 30 with sedum (green) roofs. Visualisations produced through the tender process are shown in **Figure 3.3**.

Figure 3.3: Proposed Bus Shelter Upgrades - Visualisations



Source: Alight Media

3.3 Super Summer Service



WBC and local bus operators launched the Super Summer Service (SSS) initiative on 25th July 2022, which ran for a period of 10 weeks until 4th October 2022. The SSS was funded through the Local Transport Fund, allocated by DfT, and had the following key benefits:

- Enhanced timetables, with improved evening services across the local network from 7:00pm, seven days a week;
- Cheaper fares for travel after 7:00pm (Monday-Saturday) and all day Sunday / bank holidays, with a single ticket to any destination within the borough on WOB, Arriva North West (ANW) and Go North West (GNW) services costing a maximum of £2 for an adult and £1 for children; and
- Unlimited concessionary pass use, with concessionary pass holders able to use their passes with no restriction, allowing the addition of free travel before 9:30am on weekdays.

Figure 3.4: Super Summer Service Promotional Material



When compared with the week prior to the SSS commencing, patronage on WOB's buses saw an increase of between 10% and 60% over the ten week SSS period. While the results for the initial weeks may have been affected by industrial action by Arriva drivers locally, the patronage increase still averaged around 30% for the period after the end of the industrial action, excluding the week containing the extra bank holiday for the funeral of Her Majesty the Queen. In addition, the SSS initiative appears as if it may have been revenue-generative, which raises important considerations for the fare capping proposals set out in **section 2**.

In general, when fares are reduced, it is expected that although patronage levels will increase, the amount of overall revenue received by bus operators will decrease, at least in the short term. Therefore, initiatives that reduce fares can often result in bus operators losing money in the short term, unless they receive reimbursement that covers these losses.

We will not necessarily obtain the same outcome from our wider fare capping proposals as from the SSS initiative and we note that the SSS initiative also included enhanced timetables. However, we can take some confidence from the revenue-generative nature of SSS that the level of funding made available to reimburse operators for participation in our fare capping proposals may be sufficient, and may also allow the proposals to be further enhanced.

The passenger benefits of the SSS network are being maintained at the time of submission of this update to Warrington's BSIP and further opportunities to extend them into the period of wider BSIP enhancements are currently being explored.

4. Next steps

4.1 EP Scheme Update(s)

As indicated in **section 2**, in order to qualify for BSIP funding, WBC has elected to use an Enhanced Partnership with all of Warrington's bus operators to deliver its BSIP. However, in order for the funding referred to in section 2 to be released by DfT to WBC, the EP Scheme will need to be updated, using one or more 'Variations'. Therefore, an important next step will be to draw up Variations to the EP Scheme that include the following additional obligations:

WBC shall...

- Provide the proposed new bus priority infrastructure and associated cycling and walking improvements, taking into account the level of BSIP funding allocated for this purpose and any match funding from WBC;
- Maintain a budget for expenditure on network development that matches the level of BSIP funding allocated for this purpose;
- Maintain a budget for reimbursing bus operators for participating in the fare capping proposals that matches the level of BSIP funding allocated for this purpose; and
- Maintain a budget for marketing and administrative support that matches the level of BSIP funding allocated for this purpose.

Bus operators shall...

- Reinvest a proportion of any increases in profitability that are a result of BSIP expenditure, with this reinvestment used to increase the attractiveness of bus services within Warrington.

In drawing up these Variations, the procedure for reimbursing bus operators for participating in the fare capping proposals will need to be agreed, as will the process for determining how much bus operators should reinvest. However, we initially intend to target release of the bus priority, network development and marketing and administrative support funding, with the release of the fare capping funding timed to allow a local scheme to commence following the end of the national fare capping scheme.

We will also examine any opportunities for extending child fares to those aged 16-18, how this might be funded and whether initial pilot initiatives could be undertaken to determine the extent to which such initiatives might be revenue-generative, as may have been the case with the SSS fare reduction initiative discussed in **section 3**.

4.2 Progressing Planning for Bus Priority Measures

As discussed, WBC is currently pursuing two major bus priority schemes, including the A49 Wilderspool Causeway, funded through the Town Deal, and the A49 Winwick Road to be funded through DfT BSIP funding. These schemes will combine to enhance public transport provision on the main north-south spine through the borough.

For the A49 Wilderspool Causeway scheme, the council has mobilised a project team to commence final scheme design and take the scheme through to implementation, and this scheme will be delivered in advance of the A49 Winwick Road bus priority which is due for completion in 2025. Similarly, the council is currently developing a Project Initiation Document (PID) for the A49 Winwick Road southbound bus priority scheme. Key initial tasks for this scheme include obtaining an understanding of utilities, developing a model for assessment

and visualisation, undertaking advanced preliminary design / detailed design, risk assessment and associated costing.

4.3 Monitoring

As required by the National Bus Strategy, WBC has undertaken to revise the BSIP at least annually and its progress / implications will be reflected in future updates of our Local Transport Plan. This document represents the first update to the original BSIP.

Whilst there has been initial success with the SSS initiative, as described in **section 3**, WBC is awaiting receipt of the BSIP funding and associated spend activity, which will be required to transform the bus offer in the borough. Therefore, our monitoring programme will commence once we have started to use the BSIP funding to deliver the proposed improvements, with a more detailed update of the BSIP also to be undertaken at that point, to assess whether the problems and opportunities have changed.

As part of this, WBC will provide six monthly updates on performance against the core BSIP targets, noting that some performance indicators will be reported less frequently (annually).

This will enable WBC to assess the effect of interventions and inform decisions as to whether additional measures are required and / or interventions need to be reviewed.