



Guidance On Preparing Bus Strategies

What is a bus strategy?

Section 110 of the Transport Act 2000 requires all local transport authorities to prepare a document known as a Bus Strategy, which is to be part of that authority's Local Transport Plan (LTP). There are specific requirements in section 111 of the Act to consult certain other local authorities, local bus operators or their representatives and representatives of bus users. In addition, the Act links the exercise of other powers - to make quality partnership schemes, quality contract schemes or ticketing schemes - to the implementation of policies set out in the bus strategy.

Policies and specific proposals relating to the use of buses should be clearly spelt out in relevant sections of an authority's LTP. There is no requirement to produce a separate free-standing bus strategy provided that the LTP clearly identifies how buses fit into the wider plan, and providing that consultation on the LTP at least meets the statutory consultation requirements for bus strategies. However, authorities may wish to draw together in one place all the policies and proposals which form part of their bus strategy. In which case this should be presented in an annex to the LTP.

Since a bus strategy is part of the LTP, it must have the same lifespan as the LTP to which it relates, and must be updated whenever the LTP is updated in a way that affects buses/bus policy.

Content of bus strategy

In accordance with the Act, a bus strategy must contain the authority's general policies as to how best to carry out their functions, so that:

- Bus services meet those transport requirements of people within their area that the authority consider should be met (this needs to be interpreted in the light of the Accessibility and Congestion shared priorities)
- Those bus services are provided to the required standards
- Appropriate additional facilities and services connected with bus services should be provided (this includes bus stations, bus shelters, bus priorities, information about bus services, etc but also interchanges and integration with other modes)

In the case of a PTE, some of these functions (eg those involving highway or traffic powers) will fall to the metropolitan district rather than the PTE.

Improved bus services must be at the heart of a LTP designed to improve access to jobs and services, particularly for those most in need. They will be key to reducing congestion and pollution and are safer than travelling by car.

Initiatives to make bus use more attractive can include the following, many of which will be greatly improved by working in partnership with operators:

- Improving the speed of the bus relative to the car, for example, through quality bus corridors / showcase route schemes, dedicated bus lanes, guided busways and other bus priority schemes (including bus priorities at junctions)
- park and ride schemes
- improvements to bus stops
- providing easy to read public transport information at all stages of the journey.
- use of real-time information at bus stops and other key sites
- ensuring the bus route network is well publicised and easy to understand
- ensuring bus services integrate with the full range of travel options
- improving coverage and frequency of the core bus network
- maintain a network of services, either scheduled or demand responsive, to meet the travel needs of residents away from key corridors
- ensuring that buses are comfortable, clean and well maintained
- ensuring that buses are accessible with widespread use of low floor buses
- improving the reliability and punctuality of bus services
- improving passenger safety and security on the bus network
- improving attitude of staff towards customers
- providing a broad range of appropriately priced and flexible tickets
- influencing the local planning process to ensure that all significant new development is accessible by bus
- integrating the bus network with education, social services, health services and voluntary sector transport

Bus policies will need to be developed in the context of the deregulated legislative framework as strengthened by the Transport Act 2000. Under that framework, improving bus services will be delivered most effectively by working in partnership with operators, whether through formal quality partnerships (statutory or voluntary) or other less formal agreements. The Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) and all the major operating groups are equally committed to the principle of working in partnership with local authorities. The Bus Partnership Forum has produced a range of resources approved by the CPT, LGA, ATCO and PTEG. These are available on the DfT website and include:

- "Bus priority; the way ahead" resource pack with CD-ROM
- Service Stability Code (to limit timetable changes and improve public confidence)
- Ticketing templates (to facilitate multi-operator ticketing).

The statutory powers under the Transport Act 2000 provide a range of opportunities for local authorities to take action where improvements are not being achieved by other means. As mentioned above, the powers to make quality partnership schemes, quality contracts schemes and ticketing schemes are all dependent on the bus strategy which they must play a part in implementing. This dependency should be borne in

mind when developing and setting out the bus strategy.

Where a local authority wishes to make a quality contract, the authority will need to demonstrate that this is the only practical way of delivering its bus strategy. For example, an authority wishing to implement measures to reduce congestion without reducing accessibility may need a quality contract in order to guarantee a network of affordable, frequent, bus services.

In considering an application for a quality contracts scheme, the Secretary of State will expect a clear explanation of how that scheme will implement policies in the bus strategy and why those policies cannot in practice be implemented satisfactorily by other means. This cannot be done effectively unless the policies are clearly stated in the bus strategy. (Separate guidance on quality contracts schemes is in preparation).

The bus strategy should also show how the authority's provision of subsidised services under the powers in the Transport Act 1985, as amended by the 2000 Act, supports the achievement of its local transport objectives and delivery of improvements in accessibility and social inclusion. It should also describe policies for the authority's use of Rural Bus Subsidy Grant and for continued support of successful policies previously supported by Government funding schemes such as the Rural and Urban Bus Challenges and the Rural Transport Partnership.

The 2000 Act also requires authorities, in developing their bus strategies, to have regard to any measures required or proposed for meeting the transport requirements needed in carrying out their local education or social services functions. (In the case of PTEs these will be the transport requirements of the metropolitan districts within their areas). The bus strategy should therefore be set in this wider context and give details of any steps being taken to integrate the various transport requirements.

The consultation requirements

The Act requires the local transport authority to consult:

- Any other relevant local authority whose area may be affected by the bus strategy (*'relevant local authorities'* are: other local transport authorities (English or Welsh), metropolitan district councils, London transport authorities and councils in Scotland, but in the case of consultation by a PTA, a constituent metropolitan district council is not a "relevant local authority" in this sense);
- If the authority is a county council, any district councils in its area;
- Operators of bus services in their area, or organisations representing of them;
- Organisations representing the users of bus services.

Consultation on the Bus Strategy should ideally take place in parallel with consultation on the LTP as a whole, though the elements of the LTP forming the Bus Strategy should be readily identified. The nature and timetable of the consultation process is a matter for authorities to decide, provided that it can be said to provide an early and effective opportunity for the public and stakeholders to influence the final version of the strategy.