

Bus Advisory Board – 18th July 2023

Item 4 – Somerset Enhanced Partnership (EP) - Coordination of bus timetable changes

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1. Background:

- 1.1** As part of the government’s National Bus Strategy: Bus Back Better, Local Transport Authorities were required to enter into an Enhanced Partnership (EP) with local bus operators.
- 1.2** Somerset entered into this partnership and created an Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan and Scheme which came into effect from April 2022 and sets out the obligations on both the Local Transport Authority and the local bus operators in relation to the delivery of public transport services.
- 1.3** The Scheme (Appendix A) sets out in paragraph 4.3 that “operators will work towards a system of agreed timetable change dates across the local bus network in Somerset”.

2. Recommendation:

2.1 That the operators subject to Somerset’s EP:

- i. Adopt two key periods in the year, from 2024, when timetable changes will be implemented. These are recommended as:**
 - **Easter (dates will vary depending on when Easter falls)**
 - **Beginning of September (in time for the start of the new academic year)**

- ii. Agree that the exact dates for the subsequent year will be decided at each Autumn Board meeting. With the 2024 dates being agreed at the 17th October 2023 meeting.**
- iii. Agree that flexibility will be maintained for seasonal timetable changes and emergency/unforeseen circumstances. These will be by exception and not the 'norm' and will need to be discussed/agreed with the Local Transport Authority's Public Transport Team.**
- iv. Agree that where dates of seasonal changes are known in advance, these will where possible, be registered at the same time as the Easter and September changes, although the implementation of the change will fall at a later date.**

3. Reason for Recommendations:

- 3.1** Coordination of timetable changes will ensure more consistency for both bus passengers and bus operators. It will make it easier for passengers to understand when they can expect the majority of changes to take effect during the year. It also helps operators to coordinate any changes across the network of services.

We need to maintain an element of flexibility for seasonal services where the summer/winter timetables change at alternative dates due to the levels of passenger demand. Although where these changes are known in advance, we would request that operators, where possible, submit the registration along with any other registrations for either Easter or September, so passengers are at least aware that the changes are coming. In addition, operators need to be able to react to emergency/unforeseen circumstances such as road closures /temporary diversions and unforeseen operational issues.

4. Consultation

- 4.1** Timetable changes were discussed at both the Bus Advisory Board on 25th April 2023 and the Bus User and Stakeholder Group on 13th June 2023. The general consensus from both meetings was that adopting two fixed dates, whilst maintaining some element of flexibility was welcomed. Local bus operators were contacted directly following the Board meeting and asked for their feedback. Those that responded

constitute a large proportion of the bus network and were supportive of the proposal.

Discussion has been had with other neighbouring local authorities through a meeting facilitated by the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and these proposals align with the points in the year being set by WECA and North Somerset, who are also looking at Easter and the start of the academic year.

Following internal discussions, as contracts for supported services are re-tendered the end dates will also be aligned with either the Easter or September period.

5. Background papers

Appendix A – Somerset’s Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan and Scheme

[The National Bus Strategy – Bus Back Better \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk)