

Thurrock Enhanced Partnership Plan

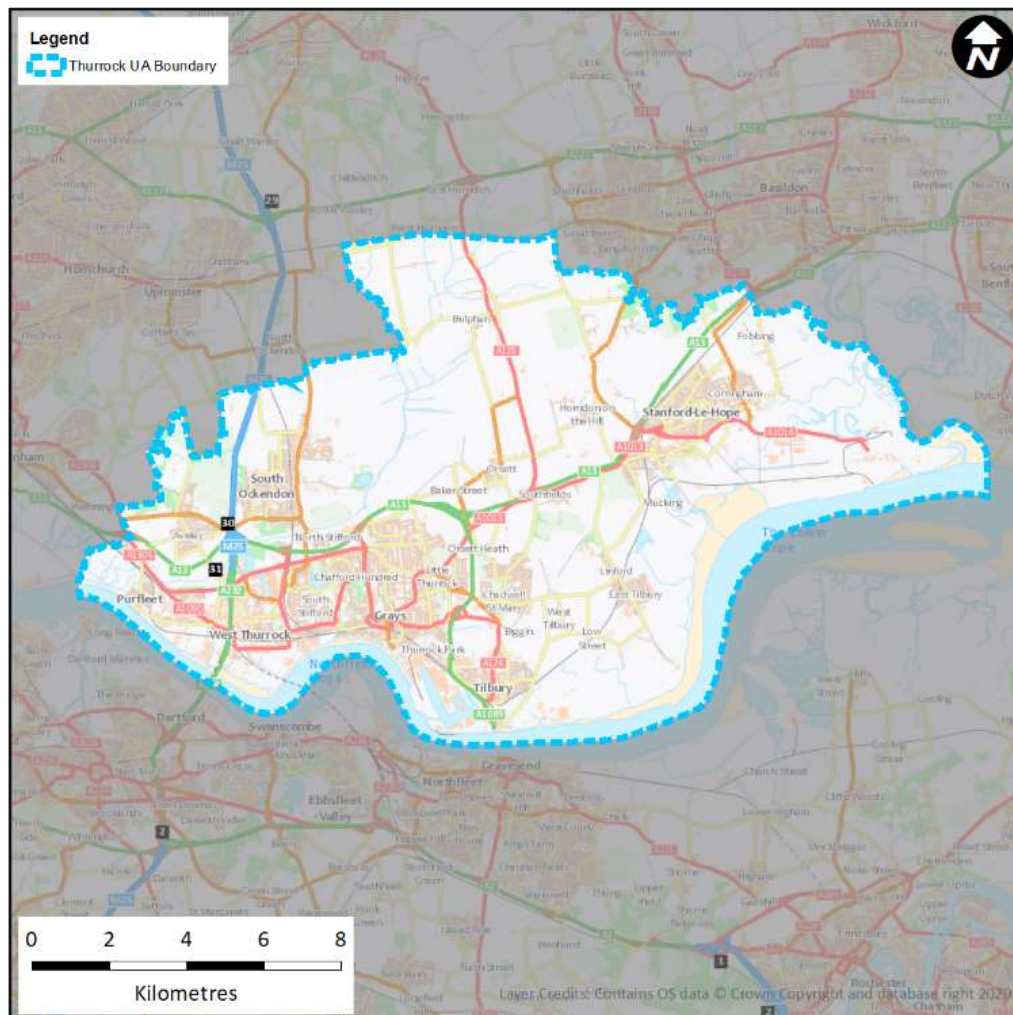
Introduction

- 1.1 This Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan is made on 01 March 2024 by Thurrock Council.
- 1.2 It will remain in place while at least one Enhanced Partnership Scheme is in place, or until Thurrock Council decides to terminate the Plan.
- 1.3 The EP Plan is reviewed annually (by 1st April), the same frequency as the Thurrock's BSIP, with the objective of ensuring the council's transport strategies and EP Plan are appropriately aligned and coherent.

Extent of the Thurrock Enhanced Partnership

- 1.4 The Thurrock EP Plan covers the full administrative unitary authority area of Thurrock Council as shown below.

Figure 0.1: Administrative boundary of Thurrock unitary authority area



Context

- 1.5 In accordance with the 2000 Act (as amended by the 2017 Act), this EP Plan is made by Thurrock Council to describe an overarching agreement between the Council and bus operators that states strategy and policy objectives, that are or will be put in place, to improve bus services in Thurrock.
- 1.6 The EP Schemes associated with this EP Plan describe the measures, facilities and commitments that will be delivered to meet the objectives of the EP Plan.
- 1.7 The underlying context is based on the Thurrock Transport Strategy¹, which focuses on four relevant elements:
- Delivering accessibility;
 - Tackling congestion;
 - Improving air quality and addressing climate change; and
 - Improving road safety.
- 1.8 These support the adopted Core Strategy which promotes growth in the borough, with significant levels of investment in new employment sites over the past ten years alongside housing. New emerging policies such as the Local Plan and Transport Strategy will support Thurrock in promoting and making available buses through infrastructure and service enhancements. The new Local Plan projects upwards of 30,000 new homes and 18,000 new jobs by 2050 in Thurrock.
- 1.9 In line with the 2021 National Bus Strategy, the Council produces and maintains a live Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)². The main objective of the BSIP, is to put in place measures that will see bus services over a larger part of the day and during more days of the week, effectively focusing on providing higher levels of service, thereby creating a bus service that can be relied upon by more people. This will attract more passengers to the bus (along with other sustainable modes) and reduce reliance on the private car. This is expected to ultimately generate additional patronage, thus ensuring that service improvements can be maintained without ongoing public financial support. Modal switch to bus travel and other sustainable modes is expected to contribute to the carbon reduction agenda and support improvements in air quality.
- 1.10 This EP Plan is drafted in accordance with the guidance issued by the Department for Transport at the time of making³ and includes:
- A map of Thurrock;
 - Thurrock Council policies relating to local bus services;

¹ Thurrock Council – Transport Strategy – 2013
https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/strategy_transport_2013.pdf

² Thurrock Council – Bus Service Improvement Plan – 2021
(<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/bus-service-improvement-plan-2021-v01.pdf>)

³ Government Enhanced Partnership Guidance – 2021
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1002507/national-bus-strategy.pdf

- The relevant factors that the parties consider will affect, or have the potential to affect, the local bus market over the life of the plan;
 - A summary of the available information on passengers' experiences of using bus services in the area and the priorities of users and non-users for improving them;
 - The available data on trends in bus journey speeds and the impact of congestion on local bus services;
 - The outcomes needed to improve local bus services in Thurrock;
 - The overall interventions the partnership believes need to be taken to deliver those outcomes; and
 - How the Plan and Scheme(s) are to be reviewed and the dates by which reviews are to be completed.
- 1.11 Thurrock Council has undertaken an assessment of the impacts of the Thurrock Enhanced Partnership Plan on competition and believes that it can be achieved without any significantly adverse effect on competition, for the purposes of Part 1 of Schedule 10 of the Transport Act 2000.
- 1.12 References in the Enhanced Partnership Plan to any legislation are to be construed as references to that legislation as from time to time amended or to any legislation from time to time replacing, extending, consolidating or amending the same.

Structure of this EP Plan

- 1.13 The Enhanced Partnership Plan comprises sections 2 to 5 in this document.
- Section 2: Background and local context, which provides a summary of the strategic policy context and current state of the bus network in Thurrock;
 - Section 3: Strategic outcomes and interventions, with a description of the strategic outcomes of the EP plan, and the interventions proposed to deliver them;
 - Section 4: Governance, defining the arrangements between the Council, bus operators and other stakeholders for the decision-making process; and
 - Section 5: Variation mechanism, which sets out the process to be followed to modify the EP Plan.
- 1.14 Associated Enhanced Partnership Schemes are provided as separate documents. Each EP Scheme will specify the applicable geography and the local bus services to which it applies.

2 Background and local context

Strategic policy context

Core Strategy and Policies for Management of Development (as amended) (2015)

- 2.1 The strategic framework governing transport interventions and planning within Thurrock are supported by land use policy and transport policy documents. The overarching policy is the existing Local Development Framework Core Strategy and Policies for Management and Development. This provides the planning policy framework for land use and new development within Thurrock. Adopted in 2015, this proposed the development of approximately 18,000 new homes by 2026 supported by 26,000 new jobs. 3,861 homes (by 31 March 2021) and 9000 new jobs (by the end of 2020) have been delivered.
- 2.2 Policies within the Core Strategy support enhancements to bus networks, to help make existing communities and new developments become more sustainable. Policy CSSP3 identifies bus service infrastructure improvements and rail station enhancements as key infrastructure needs to deliver the plan. Transport specific policies also seek to enhance the bus network. Policy CSTP 14 seeks to reduce car traffic by 10% by 2026 using a broad range of measures. Policy CSTP 15 proposes to increase accessibility to places of work, education and healthcare, while Policy CSTP 16 proposes improvements to transport networks to minimise capacity constraints with high quality inter-urban public transport routes running on a 30-min frequency.

Thurrock Transport Strategy

- 2.3 The Thurrock Transport Strategy, adopted in 2013, sets out the strategic framework for transport provision across the borough and to support the overarching goals of the Core Strategy and Local Development Framework. The strategy recognises the wider need for transport to help deliver sustainable growth and regeneration in the borough.
- 2.4 The Transport Strategy aligns closely with the objectives in the government's National Bus Strategy documentation, and the BSIP guidance, with a number of elements within the strategy overlapping with the Council's BSIP and, subsequently, this EP Plan.

New Local Plan and Transport Strategy and Vision

- 2.5 At the time of making⁴, Thurrock Council is in the process of developing a new planning policy strategy which will help support land use planning and new development within the borough until 2040. The Local Plan is indicatively proposing up to 32,000 new homes and up to 18,500 jobs across Thurrock over the life of the strategy. This will see new housing sites developed, allowing opportunities to develop sustainable communities with active and sustainable transport opportunities at the heart of their development, including bus. The new Local Plan is due to be adopted in 2024.
- 2.6 Developed alongside the Local Plan is a new Transport Strategy. Still in early development, a Vision for Transport is being developed, identifying how sustainable transport opportunities are core to the sustainability of communities within and beyond the borough. Extensive work is being undertaken to review existing provision, and those enhancements which are required

⁴ April 2022

to link the borough with its neighbouring communities. The Transport Strategy is planned to be completed and adopted later in 2024.

Climate Policies

- 2.7 Thurrock has climate policies which are supportive of modal shift towards public transportation. For example, the Thurrock Climate Local Action⁵ plan recognises the urgency and importance of cutting carbon dioxide emissions. It provides evidence that Thurrock's emissions reduced by 37% between 2005 to 2011. Over that period transport emissions remained essentially constant. Since 2011, the major bus operators (Ensignbus, First Essex and TfL) have invested in Hybrid and Euro VI buses which have resulted in lower emissions from nearly all bus movements in Thurrock. The interventions set out in this EP are designed to build on this by increasing the proportion of people's trips made by bus and other sustainable modes, thus reducing overall emissions by modal switch. Each person's carbon footprint can be reduced as a consequence of implementing this EP Plan.

Bus Service Improvement Plan

- 2.8 Thurrock Council's first BSIP⁶ was published in October 2021 and sets out its vision for bus services in the future, to meet the goals and expectations defined in national strategic policy, and outlines potential interventions to deliver the required outcomes.
- 2.9 The BSIP includes a high-level description of the current socio-economic context in Thurrock, with a specific focus on the transport context, describing its strategic rail links, general public transport and car use, and congestion levels on the highway network.
- 2.10 The BSIP will be updated annually, as required by the National Bus Strategy, and will periodically include updates on the state of the bus network, services and demand.
- 2.11 The BSIP provides detailed information on:
- Thurrock's current bus network;
 - routes and frequencies operated;
 - a breakdown of commercial and supported services;
 - commentary on areas less well served;
 - the bus operators providing bus services;
 - bus patronage;
 - bus mileage operated;
 - bus service reliability;
 - survey feedback from stakeholders on their experience of bus services across Thurrock;
 - infrastructure supporting bus services (bus stops, information equipment, bus gates, etc.);
 - Thurrock staff levels involved supporting bus services; and
 - the effect of COVID-19 pandemic (relevant at the time of making).
- 2.12 Readers of this EP Plan are invited to consult the latest BSIP⁶ for details of the most recent version of the above information.

⁵ Thurrock Climate Local Action Plan: Thurrock Council, 2015

⁶ Published by Thurrock on this webpage <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/travel-strategies/strategy-documents>

3 Strategic outcomes and interventions

Outcomes

The overarching goal of the National Bus Strategy (Bus Back Better) is “to grow bus patronage: both to build it back after the pandemic and then to increase it and raise buses’ mode share”⁷.

3.1 This EP Plan aims to support the delivery of three defined outcomes:

- Supporting the local economy;
- supporting decarbonisation; and
- providing opportunities for Thurrock residents, employees and visitors.

3.2 These outcomes will be achieved by interventions that seek to:

- increase overall bus use in Thurrock;
- reverse or slow down bus use decline (where it exists);
- provide an environment in which bus operators can provide services in a cost effective manner; and
- support decarbonisation.

Interventions

3.3 This EP Plan contains a general summary of the interventions sought.

3.4 The interventions are designed to achieve one or more of the following:

- Attract more passengers to bus services (and other sustainable modes) and reduce the need for reliance on the private car
- A reduction in the relative whole journey time and cost of travel
- An increase in levels of bus service
- An improvement in passenger experience
- An improvement in operator efficiency to help contribute to self-sustaining bus networks.

3.5 The expectations are that these will result in increased bus usage.

3.6 Individual interventions (or groups of interventions) are specified and documented in detail in EP Schemes in accordance with legislation.

3.7 The level to which these interventions depend on public sector investment is variable and this affects the timescales over which EP Schemes can be delivered.

3.8 The overall package of interventions is described in the BSIP (as periodically updated).

⁷ pp. 12; National Bus Strategy: Bus Service Improvement Plans Guidance to local authorities and bus operators, Department for Transport, May 2021

3.9 They are summarised in the table below (note that this includes interventions which are dependent on external funding):

Aspect	Proposed Intervention	Desired Outcome
Bus promotion	Maintain and extend current bus promotion activities by Thurrock Council and operators	Promote use of bus, particularly to non (or lapsed) users. Allowing both users and non-users access to many channels of information about the local bus network
More frequent and comprehensive services	Targeting specific bus services to provide a more frequent and comprehensive service across Thurrock	Improvements for areas with poor provision or with potential demand that is not met fully at all times of day by the current bus service offer
Better integrated services	Amend and/or extend bus services to provide better connections with railway stations and ferry services	Increase potential for effective multi-mode trips, particularly facilitating cross boundary trips in and out of Thurrock
Bus speed and reliability measures	Develop measures that will permit an increase in bus speeds and/or punctuality thus reducing journey times	Making bus travel more attractive by improving its relative journey time to other modes. Reduce operating costs for operators to assist in making longer term, sustainable, bus networks viable while minimising ongoing pressures on the public purse
Cheaper, simpler fares	Thurrock Council to work with operators to seek to develop solutions to deliver this goal	Making travel cheaper for users
Easier to understand and to use services	Thurrock Council to work with operators to seek to develop solutions to deliver this goal	Making travel by bus easier and, particularly for non-users, easier to understand and thus appreciate its benefits to them
Quality of Fleet	Maintain current fleet renewal	Support long term move to zero-emission fleet
Monitoring	Re-establish bus user satisfaction survey	Ensure effective feedback loop to maintain knowledge of success of interventions

4 Governance

EP Forum

4.1 The Thurrock Enhanced Partnership is monitored and reviewed by the Thurrock EP Forum (**Forum**).

Purpose

4.2 The Forum has three main purposes:

- To provide a venue for discussing matters concerning passenger public transport in and around Thurrock as they apply to the Enhanced Partnership
- To recommend proposals for the bus operators and Thurrock Council to consider for inclusion in current or future EP Schemes
- To consider and comment on proposals made by bus operators and Thurrock Council for inclusion in current or future EP Schemes

Membership

4.3 The following parties are invited to participate in the Forum:

- All operators of registered local bus services (commercial and tendered) in Thurrock
- Thurrock Council
- Adjoining local transport authorities:
 - Transport for London, Essex, Kent
- Adjoining boroughs:
 - Havering, Basildon, Brentwood, Castle Point, Dartford, Gravesham
- Sub-national transport body:
 - Transport East
- National Highways
- Community Transport
- Rail operators
- Ferry operators
- Police
- Community Forums
- Appropriate local National Health body
- Bus User Groups
- Transport Focus
- LEP
- Thurrock Business Board
- Lakeside (as infrastructure provider and core destination)
- Any other organisation as determined to be appropriate for membership of the Forum.

4.4 The Forum members nominate a chair and decide the process for renewing the chairship.

4.5 The chair may be requested by members to invite other bodies to attend specific Forum meetings as appropriate.

4.6 Thurrock Council will act as convenor and recorder for the Forum.

Forum Meetings

- 4.7 The Forum shall meet at least twice a year at times⁸ and places notified to members by Thurrock Council in writing or via email with no less than four weeks' advanced notice, except in exceptional circumstances.
- 4.8 Attendance is limited to the parties listed in paragraph 4.3 and any invitees (paragraph 4.5).

EP Oversight Group

Membership

- 4.9 The Thurrock Enhanced Partnership is managed by an Oversight Group consisting of:
- Thurrock Council
 - Any local transport authority procuring local bus services in Thurrock on the basis of that authority retaining all revenue from those services (**Controlling Authority**)
 - All operators of non-Controlling Authority registered local bus services in Thurrock

Purpose

- 4.10 The purpose of the Oversight Group is:
- To periodically review this EP Plan and the EP Scheme(s) in place
 - then to propose amendments or revocation if warranted
 - To review comments and suggestions from Forum
 - To investigate those items considered worthy of further exploration
 - To propose that Thurrock Council commissions preparation work for new EP Schemes
 - To submit draft proposals to the Forum for comment and review
 - To determine whether or not to agree recommendations for amendments to the EP Plan or new and/or amended EP Schemes.
- 4.11 The Oversight Group shall work in partnership to seek to reach outcomes through consensus. Subject to the provisions of paragraphs 4.12 and section 5, any amendments to the EP Plan or new and/or amended EP Schemes will be by agreement between all members of the Oversight Group.
- 4.12 Where the Oversight Group is not able to achieve consensus, but wishes to proceed with amendments to the EP Plan or new and/or amended EP Schemes, Thurrock Council will apply the statutory objection mechanism as set out in The Enhanced Partnership Plans and Schemes (Objections) Regulations 2018 (**Objections Regulations**), but with the following amendments:
- for so long as a Controlling Authority operates local bus services into Thurrock and the amendments to the EP Plan or new and/or amended EP Schemes affect the local bus services operated by that Controlling Authority, that Controlling Authority shall be treated as an "operator" under the Objections Regulations for the purposes of the objection mechanism; and
 - and where the objection of any Controlling Authority is deemed to be a "sufficient number" under the Objections Regulations, Thurrock Council shall not implement such amendments to the EP Plan or new and/or amended EP Schemes.

⁸ Virtually or face to face

- 4.13 In respect of any local registered bus services procured by a Controlling Authority and where that authority retains all the revenue from that service, Thurrock Council may, on request from the Controlling Authority, agree to exempt those services from any amendments to the EP Plan or any new or amended EP Scheme.

Meetings

- 4.14 At a minimum, the Oversight Group shall meet⁹ no less than once between each Forum meeting (paragraph 4.7). This enables the group to both consider the outcomes of the past meeting and prepare for the upcoming Forum meeting. Except in exceptional circumstances, no less than four weeks' notice shall be provided in advance of a meeting, made in writing or via email. The group may meet on other occasions as considered appropriate by one or more of its members.
- 4.15 The Oversight Group will be chaired by Thurrock Council which will also act as convenor and recorder for the group.

⁹ Virtually or face to face

5 Variation Mechanism

- 5.1 Subject to prior agreement by the Oversight Group, all proposed material amendments and/or variations to this EP Plan will be subject to the Variation mechanism laid down in law¹⁰.
- 5.2 Each EP Scheme associated with this EP Plan shall contain variation clauses appropriate to the particular EP Scheme.

¹⁰ Section 138K of the 2000 Transport Act as amended in October 2021