

# Engagement summary

## Rownham Hill | public transport design proposals

Date of report: August 2024

### Context: Rownham Hill and the Bus Service Improvement Plan

We want North Somerset communities to have a modern, efficient, reliable, and affordable public transport system they can enjoy for years to come. This includes providing more frequent bus services, low fare offers, new transport hubs – better connecting public transport services – along with improved walking and cycling facilities and new bus lanes to reduce bus journey times. Improved transport services benefit everyone.

The below is a summary of feedback we received from our community engagement on proposals for public transport improvements at the Rownham Hill junction outside Bristol, which took place between 7 February and 22 March 2024.

### Rownham Hill context

- Rownham Hill is a key junction in the North Somerset network and a source of significant congestion which also impacts buses. It has a four-arm crossroads where Bridge Road and the Ashton Court access road join the A369.
- Traffic data suggests a typical 2-minute peak period delay for traffic travelling in each direction on the A369. However, if there is any disruption at the bottom of the hill in the Cumberland basin, the delay is much more pronounced. It is expected some of this delay can be mitigated by changes to the Rownham Hill junction, including giving buses priority.
- Rownham Hill is serviced by the popular X4 bus service connecting Portishead and Bristol, which currently carries around 71,000 passenger journeys every month, with demand expected to rise. It is currently only able to run every 20 minutes in peak times, up from 30 minutes, due to a subsidy of £380,000 a year from the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to fund additional buses running on this route.
- Bus priority infrastructure changes are proposed at Rownham Hill, alongside others on the A369, to make the X4 service quicker and better placed to maintain its 20-minute frequency without additional buses, resulting in a financially sustainable service that can continue to meet the needs of the community once BSIP funding ends.



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## The Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) context

- Our purpose is to create a well-connected public transport system fit for now and the future. Investing in bus services now in order to increase passenger numbers helps protect future services. We aim for services to be well used and cost effective, making the bus service more financially viable for bus operators to continue to run. Our communities tell us they want more reliable, frequent and affordable bus services – and that’s what we’re working hard to deliver.
- Funding to improve bus services through the BSIP is available only for a short time, but its long-term legacy will be more reliable, efficient and frequent bus services, new electric buses which are better for the environment, and more financially secure bus services fit for our growing population now and in the future.
- We’re also delivering more affordable fares, such as the current £2 offer, and investing in more frequent bus services, along with upgraded bus stops, and aiming to create attractive new transport hubs offering a range of facilities including secure cycle parking, local information displays and electric charging points to benefit communities further.
- At the same time, new cycling and pedestrian crossings along with dedicated bus lanes, new traffic signals and other measures will help people move more efficiently across key North Somerset locations. These focus chiefly on a chain of changes along three of our key routes: the A369, A38 and A370.
- Our aim is that together these changes will help to make buses the first-choice mode of transport for more of our residents.
- Without bus priority improvements to help make bus travel faster, more reliable and more efficient, bus services in North Somerset may have to be cancelled, or significantly scaled back, once the Department for Transport’s (DfT) financial support through BSIP ends. As a local authority, we simply do not have the funds to subsidise bus services in North Somerset, and this situation is unlikely to change in the future.
- North Somerset has faced this situation before: in 2022, around a quarter of North Somerset’s overall bus network (in terms of miles covered) was lost, from entire routes being to a drop in service frequencies, as these could not be financially sustained by operators.
- In the last few months, BSIP teams have been actively engaging with North Somerset communities on a number of different concepts, proposals, and works for the next phase of bus priority schemes, including at Rownham Hill.



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- The information, knowledge and views that residents share with us through our engagement activity is invaluable to the design and build process for BSIP. It is an important part of our process for checking and testing whether proposals will be effective, and further developing, remodelling, or refining scheme proposals before any final decisions are made to progress to construction.
- The North Somerset Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) is a joint initiative between North Somerset Council (NSC), the West of England Combined Authority (WECA), the Department for Transport (DfT), bus operators, and other stakeholders.

## About the proposed BSIP scheme at Rownham Hill

The initial concept designs engaged on for Rownham Hill included:

- Proposed creation of a new bus lane on both A369 approaches to the junction.
- Creating a new eastbound lane in the centre of the road.
- Upgrading the junction traffic signals to give priority to approaching buses. The junction would also be linked to the nearby traffic signals at Beggar Bush Lane.
- Upgrading bus stops on the A369, in the vicinity of the junction, over the next two years, to create enhanced waiting facilities for both Leigh Woods residents and visitors to Ashton Court.
- Considering improved access into Ashton Court for cyclists.

## Summary of engagement activity undertaken to date

We invited local people to give their feedback and help shape the proposals. This activity included:

- Meetings with ward members and local parish councils
- A survey, open for public comment for six weeks (Wednesday 7 February to Friday 22 March 2024). Paper copies of the survey were available on request. 279 online surveys were completed during this period.

## Survey overview

We received **279** total responses to the anonymous, opt-in survey, of which:

- **121** answered they were from Leigh Woods, and **66** were from 'Wider North Somerset'.



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- **61** were from Abbots Leigh, **22** were from Bristol, and **9** were from Long Ashton.
- **103** of the 279 respondents (**37%**) answered that they regularly use the bus through Rownham Hill.
- There was a near equal split in the stated gender of respondents, with **140** answering female, and **133** answering male.
- **18** of the respondents said they considered themselves disabled.
- The survey was predominantly quantitative (numeric), with two qualitative (free text) questions. Analysis was conducted to identify key themes across the responses.

## ! An important note on this survey

- **The purpose of the survey and engagement period was to gather local views and insight to help inform the development** of an appropriate bus priority scheme at Rownham Hill to support the current and future needs of a growing population and decarbonisation.
- **The survey was based on a self selecting sample of participants.** It was not a survey of a representative sample of the local population. For a survey to be considered representative, the participant sample would have to be weighted to reflect local characteristics in terms of age, gender, income bracket, ethnic heritage, disability, and so on. This means any outputs should be considered with this in mind.
- **The survey contained two open-ended (qualitative) questions (two out of 12 questions).** Analysis has been conducted to identify the most common themes across these free-text responses. More than one theme was allowed per answer when analysing free-text answers.
- **This survey is one part of shaping proposed designs, alongside technical testing, monitoring and data gathering at proposed scheme locations.** We consider all data sets in the round alongside community representations in order to make informed, technically sound recommendations about each scheme's design.
- **Not all survey participants answered all questions.**
- **The results include a summary of the consultation responses received, showing the most frequently made points.** Individual issues that had a lower response rate are still considered.

**Of the 279 people who took the survey, responses saw:**



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## Question: Installing new bus lanes on the A369

'We are proposing to make several improvements to the Rownham Hill junction...The main upgrade will be to install new bus lanes on the A369 at the approach to the junction that run in both directions. The new design will involve creating a new bus lane in the centre of the road on the A369 eastbound towards Bristol and installing a bus lane running in the other direction towards the M5 from the bottom of Rownham Hill. 'The proposal will involve widening the carriageway and will keep the current car lanes. Do you agree with this proposal?'

- 215 respondents answered 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree'
- 64 respondents answered 'Agree', 'Strongly Agree', or 'Neutral'.

## Question: Upgrading traffic signals at Rownham Hill junction

'We propose to upgrade the traffic signals at Rownham Hill junction to give some priority to approaching buses. The junction lights will be linked to adjacent signals at Beggar Bush Lane, once the works on those are complete, to help manage traffic flow and allow public transport to take priority. Do you agree with this proposal?'

- 186 respondents answered 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree'
- 93 respondents answered 'Agree', 'Strongly Agree', or 'Neutral'.

## Question: Upgrading the bus stops

'We propose to upgrade the bus stops in the vicinity of the Rownham Hill junction over the next few years, providing enhanced waiting facilities for residents of Leigh Woods and visitors to Ashton Court. Do you agree with this proposal?'

- 215 respondents answered 'Agree', 'Strongly Agree', or 'Neutral'
- 64 respondents answered 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree'.

## Question: Improving access into Ashton Court for cyclists

'We propose improving access into Ashton Court for cyclists. Do you agree with this proposal?'

- 204 respondents answered 'Agree', 'Strongly Agree', or 'Neutral'
- 74 respondents answered 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree'.



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## Question: Open-ended feedback

'Do you have any further comments you'd like to make on the proposals?'

The following four themes were the most prevalent in respondents' free-text comments on the proposals (more than one theme noted per answer):

- That the proposals would cause further delays (appeared in 129 comments)
- Concerns over the perceived usefulness of any changes (appeared in 65 comments)
- Perception that the costs would outweigh the benefits (appeared in 57 comments)
- Concerns that the proposals would impact on the environment (appeared in 41 comments). Within this theme, several respondents raised issues and safety concerns around drainage and flooding on the A369. Others voiced concerns that a loss of grass verges under the scheme would lead to increased surface water through reduced green space.

## Actions and next steps following scheme engagement period

- Reducing congestion and bus delays at the Rownham Hill junction is critical for improving the reliability and commercial sustainability of local bus services, and alleviating the pressure on our road network as our population grows (see Context).
- We are grateful to everyone who took part to have their say on early proposals for bus infrastructure changes at Rownham Hill through our survey.
- We received a lot of detailed comments and useful local insights, which we are continuing to work through, and will now be undertaking further technical testing and surveys to understand the issues raised and consider all information available to us.
- The Rownham Hill scheme is part of the North Somerset Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), funded by the Department for Transport (DfT), and we are asking DfT for an extension to the delivery timetable for all remaining BSIP schemes.
- This will give us more time to plan works over a longer period, reduce disruption as far as possible, and review proposals for all remaining BSIP schemes. That might mean moving forward with the original proposal, revising a concept design, identifying alternative measures or not progressing with schemes that don't deliver the intended benefits.
- This extension means no decision on any Rownham Hill junction scheme will be made before November 2024.



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## **Our work over the coming months will include:**

- Reviewing the scope and feasibility of the scheme, following engagement with the community, with a view to scaling back the original concept design
- Updating the junction modelling
- Reassessing the condition of the existing site
- Updating proposed scheme design drawings to reflect further technical work.

## **Once all the above work has been completed, we will:**

- Share information on any new proposals with ward members and parish councillors by November 2024.

**Please note:** Council approvals for BSIP schemes are completed in two stages. The first approval stage is in consultation with the BSIP Formal Board and Executive Member, and the final approval is an Executive Member Decision. This happens before a scheme is approved to proceed to be built.

The anticipated date of the Executive Member decision will be published in the Council's Forward Plan. We do not anticipate a decision to be made on the Rownham Hill A369 junction before November 2024.



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