

Questions, answers and actions

North Somerset Council 2024 Bus-User Forums

25 and 27 November 2024

Document purpose

This document:

- Provides a record of residents' questions that North Somerset Council and First Bus representatives spoke to, or responded to through the chat function, in the online Bus Forum.
- Notes actions that North Somerset Council has committed to take in response to forum feedback.

For a record of the presentations shared in our Bus Forums you can watch the recording on our website.

This document does not include feedback that was collected through sticky notes and Slido.com polls during interactive sessions.

Promotions, communications, and branding:

Could delivering timetables to homes, like the WECA travel guides, increase awareness of services like X5/6/7/8/9?

North Somerset Council: This is a good idea, and travel guides have already been delivered to every household in North Somerset.

What about engaging with Weston College?

North Somerset Council: We have been engaging with the College recently and are looking at doing an event with students there in the coming months.



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Would the new electric buses be in Badgerline colours, noting the strength of this brand?

First Bus: No, they will be in the new 'WEST' livery as part of the Enhanced Partnership commitment for a single, stronger regional brand. This will see a transition away from the Badgerline colours as new buses come into our fleet and older buses are repainted as part of our normal cycle.

What efforts are being made to engage local communities, noting relatively low attendance at Bus Forum events?

North Somerset Council: We've offered a mix of times and both face to face and online opportunities to participate in this year's Bus Forums.

The team have also gone out to town and parish councils on several occasions which are often public meetings. The team has also hosted six roadshows and continues outreach efforts. Plans include future events in Nailsea, as well as more community-specific engagement like the Personalised Travel Planning Scheme in Pill.

Let us know if you're interested in hearing about future engagement opportunities, or have any ideas about how we can advertise our events and engagement as widely as possible.

North Somerset Council actions and commitments:

- Review input on communications, marketing and promotions interactive sessions and factor into planning for 2025/26.
- Work with Travel Champions and community groups in planning future bus forums and engagement events, improve accessibility of engagement events.
- Look into trip planning tools in Devon, Cornwall and Wales, and pass feedback on to the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority team responsible for WEST travel planning.



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Bus stops, shelters, information boards and hubs

Will Wi-Fi be available at new shelters?

North Somerset Council: There are no plans for Wi-Fi due to high installation and maintenance costs. However, feedback on the matter is appreciated.

Many people lack smartphones for QR code timetables, what other options exist?

North Somerset Council: Most stops will continue displaying paper timetables. QR codes are for stops with no existing timetable displays. While paper timetables for all 1,500 stops would be ideal, funding limitations prevent this.

Feedback on Real Time Information (RTI) display in Weston—screen size and lighting concerns?

North Somerset Council: The screen in Weston is a trial, which is helping to finalise design and function before wider roll out in early Summer 2025. This will include 23” screens for RTI installations at current stops, and larger 32” screens for RTI installations at new shelters. All screens, including the one in Weston, will light up once buttons are pressed.

What is the £12,083,000 listed for “integrated services” in the BSIP document?

North Somerset Council: This funding covers transport hubs, bus stop enhancements, and similar initiatives. For more details, see page 15 and the table on page 23 of the West of England Bus Service Improvement Plan: [West of England Bus Service Improvement Plan](#).

North Somerset Council actions and commitments:

- Note concerns about timetables through QR codes, and consider more accessible options if funding is made available.
 - **Action taken:** Phone signal strength to be logged in future NSC and West of England Mayoral Combined Authority bus stop and shelter audits.
 - **Action taken:** More accessible methods of accessing bus information to be reviewed in line with LTN/25 and 25/26 funding.



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- Consider feedback to provide an accessible bus stop for Kingscott Mill residents, and bus stop accessibility in Locking Village.
 - **Action taken:** Locking Village bus stop accessibility to be addressed in line with First and Last Mile prioritisation process.

Bus lanes and road infrastructure

Are Clevedon bus lane plans appropriate given the current service frequency, and was the community engaged appropriately?

North Somerset Council: Clevedon's bus lane plans have changed significantly. The design evolution has been directly informed by community feedback and additional technical surveys and monitoring - and reviewing this all in the round, to understand the most beneficial way forward. Our engagement period included a dedicated public information event in Clevedon, and a six-week survey, open to all. The council is reviewing the bus frequency to ensure it best meets needs.

Long Ashton Bypass bus lane is helping buses skip traffic, but there are still issues with the bus lane at Brockley. Is there an explanation for this?

North Somerset Council: The Brockley Combe traffic lights are set up to give buses using the bus lane priority over other traffic where it is safe to do so. The system works by tracking buses' GPS locations to trigger the lights to turn green as the bus approaches. While the lights do give buses priority currently, changes have been needed to the digital system behind the scenes to get it working to its full potential. We expect this to be in place very soon, which means all approaching buses using the Brockley Combe bus lane will be given priority whenever it is safe to do so.

North Somerset Council actions and commitments:

- Review input on infrastructure messaging and bring into BSIP vision document and communications planning for 2025/26.
- Continue working with First Bus to fully synchronise traffic lights at Brockley Combe with approaching buses.



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Bus fares and ticketing:

Why can't Diamond Travel Cards be used in Scotland and Wales?

North Somerset Council: This is due to national government legislation. However, there is a local mutual agreement allowing travel to and from Chepstow on the T7 with an English or Welsh pass.

Can I use a Diamond Travel Card on the A3 airport service?

North Somerset Council: Concessionary bus passes can be used on the A3, except for trips that start or end at the airport. Residents in certain postcodes can apply for an airport pass, which allows discounted travel on the A3, including free travel for holders of concessionary bus passes. Information available here: [Local resident Concessionary schemes](#).

Regarding the 9am rule on Diamond Travel Cards, is there any movement expected?

North Somerset Council: National legislation sets the free travel period from 9.30am to 11pm on weekdays. However, the Council funds an extension of this to start at 9am, and free travel is available all day on weekends and public holidays.

Additional fare options for local travel in places like Portishead, Clevedon, and Nailsea?

First Bus: Town Fares are available for short hops within these areas, with a single adult ticket costing £1.80 through Tap On, Tap Off, the First Bus app or from the driver. This is significantly below the £2.40 standard fare for shorter journeys that's been in place since 1st Jan in response to the end of the government's £2 single fare cap.

Issues with drivers not recognizing the Freedom Travelpass?

First Bus: We brief our drivers on the range of tickets but there can be the occasional case where drivers encounter, or are asked for, a ticket that they don't see very often. The Freedom Travelpass is a great way to combine rail and bus travel under one ticket and there is information about it in the Tickets section of the First West of England website (www.firstbus.co.uk, then select the Bristol, Bath and the West region).



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North Somerset Council actions and commitments:

- Support clear communication of bus fares, including the new £3 cap increase, and Town Fares.

Planning and delivery of bus services

Why does WESTlink seem not to serve Nailsea?

North Somerset Council: Nailsea was initially excluded because the zones were focused on areas without bus services. However, due to quick mobilization, the zones were merged, allowing towns like Portishead and Clevedon to be included, while Nailsea and Long Ashton were not. The challenge now is to meet demand with stretched resources, making it difficult to extend services to other towns.

Are electric buses cheaper to operate than diesel?

First Bus: Electric buses have higher upfront costs – including the cost of installing the charging infrastructure – but the operating costs per mile are lower, and the benefits will increase as depots become fully electric and we don't have to manage diesel and electric buses. Continued improvements in battery technology will also help.

Why are Nailsea and Clevedon bus services underperforming, and what can be done to improve passenger numbers?

First Bus: We are focused on gathering local feedback to improve services. The goal is to balance demand with keeping journey times and costs down. Direct routes tend to perform better, and working with limited public funding means that funds must be used effectively.

From April, we will be enhancing the provision of buses from Clevedon to Bristol, as well as re-routing the X7 so that it is a more useful bus locally and in the region. The new X7 will provide a direct link to Nailsea and Backwell station. The X6 will also be enhanced to a half-hourly frequency, which will mean that Clevedon will benefit from a service into Bristol 3 times per hour, with 2 of those departures being fast and direct via Failand (as the X6).



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What are First Bus doing to improve the transport options for students attending Weston College from the surrounding areas such as Clevedon/Portishead?

First Bus: The X5 is underperforming, and therefore while it would be great to increase its frequency, this would come with significant costs. We have done a study in the West of England recently which has suggested potential improvements.

We have listened to the major complaints from residents on the X5 are re-routing the service back via the M5 motorway from April 2025. We are also pleased to say that the service will run directly on from Weston Interchange to Weston General Hospital and Loxton Road Campus (Weston College) from April 2025.

What's the breakeven number of passengers per hour?

First Bus: Roughly 30–35 passengers per hour for us to cover operating costs like fuel, maintenance, and staffing. This varies depending on what fares passengers are paying, which will reflect the mix of adults paying full fares and younger passengers and students paying lower fares, as well as the number of concessionary pass users. It will also reflect the type of service – longer routes will have passengers paying higher fares, so we need fewer passengers per hour to cover our costs.

How is First Bus improving reliability, especially noting recent cancellations?

First Bus: Operating a reliable service is of course a top priority for us, not least because we, like all bus operators, are accountable to the Office of The Traffic Commissioner in terms of running punctual services.

There are often factors outside our control, such as the weather and congestion, that impact our punctuality and reliability. We are constantly working on the things that are in our control, so making sure we are fully staffed, maintaining our buses to the highest standards and using data to review the performance of each service and making changes to the timetables where necessary. As part of the Enhanced Partnership, we also work very closely with North Somerset Council to review our performance and agree where action is needed, whether that is by us as an operator or by the council in terms of addressing issues with the roads and providing greater bus priority.



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The introduction of electric buses is expected to improve reliability further, as they've proven to be more dependable than diesel buses.

Do improved services lead to more bus travel, or does increased travel lead to better services?

First Bus: Both. We generate more bus travel where services are as direct and fast as possible, reliable, punctual, more frequent and offer a good overall experience that is value for money. Equally, the more people that travel, the more revenue we generate from fares and the more we can invest in ongoing improvements to existing services as well as launching new ones where the demand is there. We need to find the right balance between the cost of enhancing services and the uncertainty around the level of demand that these enhancements will generate.

BSIP funding available through North Somerset Council has given us the opportunity to enhance services across our North Somerset network whilst protecting us against the uncertainty of how many new users we can attract. The more people that travel, the greater the chance that service enhancements can continue with no, or at least less, reliance on funding. In addition to the judgement on where investment will cover its costs, we always need to be mindful of how many drivers we can recruit to run more services.

Any chance of changes to connect Nailsea Town Centre to the Nailsea and Backwell Station, or a service between Nailsea and Portishead happening?

First Bus: We have often made changes to Nailsea services but note that solving an issue often causes problems elsewhere in the network. We are currently discussing options with North Somerset Council, with the potential for future changes, depending on funding availability.

Why not use smaller buses for remote areas and larger buses for direct routes?

First Bus: we operate smaller buses where it's appropriate, factoring in the level of demand and the physical nature of the route. Smaller buses will tend to have some benefit in terms of lower cost, based on lower fuel consumption, although most other costs (particularly the driver cost, which is the single biggest cost and is the same regardless of the type of bus) are not materially different between smaller and larger buses.



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North Somerset Council actions and commitments:

- Review feedback and suggestions from WESTlink and supported services interactive sessions, and bring in 2025/26 planning.
- Raise awareness of the West of England Bus passenger charter, including feedback channels, and how users can check their eligibility for free tickets, or the cost a 'reasonable alternative method'.
- Review and consider service specific feedback, including Yatton services, and services 126, X6, X7, 9, and 20, in April and September 2025 service changes.
- Coordinate with neighbouring councils to improve the sustainability of key coach routes, including the Falcon and routes connecting Bristol, Devon and Plymouth.
- Investigate reports of WESTlink buses being used for school contracts, and investigate WESTlink complaints statistics.
- Investigate opportunities to use £5 million funding boost for bus services to enhance supported services, including potential changes in April and September 2025.



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